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**Engaging the parent/whānau community:
Methods, benefits, and challenges for senior leaders in small
town and rural New Zealand secondary schools**

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree

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ABSTRACT

Engaging parents and whānau (family) in a respectful partnership that develops strong home-school connections and uses effective methods of engagement has the potential to positively affect student outcomes. However, there are also methods of engagement that can be counterproductive and negatively affect student outcomes. This study presents how senior leaders in small town and rural secondary schools in New Zealand are engaging with their parent and whānau community. The investigation reveals what methods they are using to engage parents and whānau and, how effective they and a small number of parents and whānau consider these are, then outlines some of the benefits and challenges that they face in this process.

The literature reviewed for this study emphasised the benefits of engagement between parents, whānau and school leaders, along with the essential ingredients necessary for successful home-school partnerships and how senior leaders play a critical role in developing the conditions for schools' engagement with their parent and whānau community. The consideration of aspects from New Zealand's political and educational history illuminated possible reasons why parents and whānau of Māori descent struggle to connect with schools, and how concepts which have traditionally guided the way of life for these indigenous people can be and are being used by school leaders to develop strong, respectful enduring partnerships. Research on the rural context and how schools in this type of location manage engagement was also studied and seen as yet another factor that senior leaders need to bear in mind when planning for engagement. Examination of three types of engagement – involvement, empowerment, and solidarity, revealed that each is characterised by certain practices and represent a progression in the level of contribution and commitment parents and whānau give to the school. Engagement and progression are, however, dependent on how connected parents and whānau are to their child's school and how much of a sense of belonging they have.

The study was conducted using an interpretive paradigm to afford richer more detailed descriptions to be gathered from both the senior leaders at three small town and rural schools, and some of the parent and whānau community of each of these schools. A mixed-methods approach was taken to gather and triangulate both qualitative and quantitative data. Qualitative data collected and analysed included semi-structured interviews with senior leaders, descriptive survey submissions from parents and whānau, along with planning and

review documents for each school. Quantitative data derived from parents and whānau surveys and represents their preferred methods of engagement with the school statistically.

The study findings indicate that the schools use a range of methods to engage parents and whānau. These include face to face interactions and time-efficient digital communication systems. Some such as an open door policy and parent conferences were reported as effective by leaders and whānau. Furthermore, it was found that there is no one way to engage with all parents and whānau, some liked to participate in events and activities and derived a sense of belonging from this while others simply preferred to gather information and not engage with the school beyond this need.

Partnerships between parents, whānau and school leaders that were built on respectful relationships and the acknowledgement of difference were said to lead to stronger connections and more productive working relationships, by the senior leaders in all of the schools in the study. These could be said to reflect the use of guiding concepts for living in partnership used by Māori, which the schools in this study were using as foundations in building and sustaining the partnerships with their parents and whānau. The three types of engagement, structured in a progressive framework, also illustrated to school leaders where their parent and whānau community were situated and where they as leaders needed to work further to strengthen and secure both the partnership and to increase engagement.

Further research as a result of this study could relate to gaining a better understanding of why specific methods of engagement are more acceptable to parents and whānau than others. It could involve looking at the delivery of these methods by senior leaders in more detail, and trialling the three-stage framework on a larger scale and in different contexts, particularly in urban areas where school roll numbers are higher, and communities are less connected.

MIHI

Kia Ora tatou

Ko Kaukau te māunga

Ko te awa kairangi te awa

No te Whanga-nui-a tara ahau

Ko ngāti pākehā te iwi

Ko Kallahar tōku whānau

Ko David tōku ingoa

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Putting this thesis together has been one of the most challenging things I have undertaken in my life and I have a newfound appreciation for academic research and writing as a result. The topic of this thesis is close to my heart and I know I will draw upon it many times in the future as I continue my voyage of discovery in educational leadership. The journey has seen many hills and valleys, yet thankfully I have met and worked with some wonderful people along the way.

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- My gratitude goes out to all the parents and whānau who took the time and shared their views with me on a topic of such importance. I acknowledge their contribution to this study and their dedication to their child’s education.
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CHAPTER ONE – Introduction

Nā tō rourou, nā taku rourou ka ora ai te iwi

With your food basket and my food basket the people will thrive

The influences of parents and whānau have been identified as ‘key levers’ for high-quality student outcomes (Biddulph, Biddulph, & Biddulph, 2003), and an essential aspect of learning in the New Zealand Curriculum (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2015). Research also points out that strong home-school partnerships have a positive impact on student achievement (Epstein, 2004). However, there is very little guidance on what methods are most effective in developing, securing, and sustaining these connections. Over the last 20 years the Ministry of Education has developed a range of policies to encourage the development of these home-school partnerships, however, while policy details what schools need to do, and research indicates why connections with parents and whānau are important, what is lacking is how such relationships might be achieved (Berryman, 2014). Furthermore, as there is also clear disparity between Māori and Non-Māori learners, identify ways in which schools can engage more effectively with their Māori parent and whānau community is critical to closing this gap (Berryman, 2014).

I am currently a Head of Faculty at a large urban secondary school and have been teaching for eight years. Previously I lived for many years in a rural community where I was the chairperson for the local primary school Board of Trustees. It was in that role that I first recognised the need for developing strong home-school partnerships, and the impact, both positive and negative, that engagement between parent, whānau and school leaders could have on student outcomes and the growth of the school. What I experienced has helped me to develop an understanding of what I believe to be effective methods of engagement, however, I am looking for this study, through both the review of current literature and the case studies to be undertaken, to confirm, alter and inform my thinking as I strive towards my goal to one day becoming the principal of a secondary school in a small town or rural area.

The objective of the study is to identify the methods used by senior leaders in small town and rural secondary schools to engage with their parent and whānau community. The intended outcome being information that can then form the foundation of a framework which can be applied in similar school environments to develop and sustain strong home-school partnerships. Navigating the complexities of what makes a successful partnership between schools and their parent/whānau community requires looking at the methods used from a range of perspectives. My belief is that, unless you have each piece of a puzzle, you cannot fully see the truth that lies within the whole picture. While we can often guess what things possibly look like with only an outline or partial view, we leave ourselves in danger of missing some of the details that may be hidden which could change the whole meaning of the picture.

The structuring of this study, therefore, looks to approach addressing the key question in a balanced and holistic manner, taking in the views of all parties, and looking at the whole partnership. In doing so it is hoped that there will not only be a greater likelihood that the findings of this study will be more transferable to other schools in a similar context (small town/rural), but also endeavouring to ensure a lesser likelihood that important aspects which are not readily apparent, yet are critical, are not missed. While the primary focus of the study is on the methods that are employed by senior leaders to engage with parents and whānau, I will endeavour to gain an understanding as to why they have chosen to use these methods, how effective they are, what benefits and challenges have they experienced, and how they have overcome these.

This thesis is arranged in six chapters. Chapter One provides an overview of the topic being explored, justification for the study, and a brief outline of my interest in the topic and about me as the researcher. Chapter Two examines a range of literature from both national and international sources to provide a foundation understanding of the topic, and to allow comparisons to be drawn and explained with the findings of the study. Chapter Three outlines the methodology, data collection and analysis methods used, and ethical considerations and processes are also defined. Chapter Four presents the finding of the research, while Chapter Five discusses these finding in relation to the research question, and in comparison with the literature reviewed. Chapter Six delivers a summary of the key findings, the limitations of the study, recommendations, and suggestions for further research.

Terms used in this study:

Māori: The indigenous people of New Zealand.

Tikanga: Tikanga is a term used by Māori which refers to ‘the right way’ of doing things. It reflects people doing things in a way that is seen as morally, spiritually, and socially appropriate.

Kotahitanga: Kotahitanga is a state achieved when everyone is united for the realisation of a shared objective.

Mahi Tahi: Mahi (work) tahi (one) describes the unity of a group of people working together towards a specific goal, often in a hands-on fashion.

Manaakitanga: Manaakitanga describes the authority and obligation of a host to promote and care for the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual wellbeing of visitors.

Whānaungatanga: Whānaungatanga is a process where links and connections are made when people come together as a means of discovering whakapapa (genealogical) linkage.

Ako: Ako describes a reciprocal teaching and learning relationship. It focuses on learning as a dual experience in which a person can be both teacher and learner.

Whānau: Whānau is a term that is often translated to mean ‘extended family’ or ‘family group’. It incorporates all the people who are seen as ‘kin’, biologically related or not and also carries with it a bond that signifies a duty of care for all members of a whānau group to nurture and support those being cared for.

Mana Whenua: The concept of Mana Whenua acknowledges the indigenous people of the land as the tribal guardians of that land. Therefore, whatever happens on that land should ideally involve the active participation and commitment of the mana whenua.

CHAPTER TWO – Literature Review

Hapaitia te ara tika pumau ai te rangatiratanga mo nga uri whakatipu

*Foster the pathway of knowledge to strength, independence, and growth
for future generations.*

2.1 Introduction

This literature review begins by looking at the home-school partnership between parents and whānau and school leaders. Developing an understanding of what this might be and what this could represent in terms of benefits and challenges for all parties. Parents, whānau and school leaders are then explored in greater depth, to understand their make-up and the motivation towards engaging with each other. What engagement between home and the school looks like in an educational context is then investigated, with an emphasis on frameworks used to guide, explain and gauge levels and types of engagement between parents, whānau and school leaders. The chapter is then concluded by looking at the unique challenges of the New Zealand context upon education and, the development of home-school partnerships, including how these can or cannot foster positive student outcomes and the growth of schools in small-town and rural areas.

Woven into this review is the inclusion of selected Māori concepts which provide an indigenous perspective on ways of thinking and engaging with people. This approach is taken because of the high Māori population in many of the small town and rural areas of New Zealand, on which this study is focused. It is postulated that through the consideration of these concepts and their application, it will be possible to view engagement in a more authentic way. Doing so could then better explain to school leaders some possible approaches that they could use to engage with parents and whānau in these small communities while respecting their culture and traditions.

2.2 Home/School partnerships

2.2.1 Definition:

Developing meaningful home-school partnerships are a significant objective for schools as they provide many benefits to all parties involved (Robinson, Hohepa, & Lloyd, 2007). A meaningful home-school partnership involves a mutual commitment from parents, whānau and all school staff to work together, in a collaborative, respectful (Education Review Office, 2016), power-sharing partnership (Berryman, 2014) to not only improve student learning but also to help grow the school (Department of Education). Historically, however, these partnerships between parents, whānau and schools have been a one-sided affair, governed by the school (Bishop & Glynn, 1999). The reality is that schools in the 21st century are struggling to meet the needs of their students and society, and they cannot educate students alone (Bull, 2011).

Parents and whānau, on the other hand, are not only the primary caregivers of their children, but they are also seen as their first teachers (Quezada, 2016), and the most influential people children have in their lives in an ongoing relationship (Education Review Office, 2016). However, while it might seem obvious to say that all or most parents and whānau want the best for their children, including their success at school, many do not know how to help them thrive at school, and they lack the abilities to support them in doing so (Johnson, 2012). There is, therefore, a genuine need by both parties to work together, and what is clear, is that students develop better when home and school work together in partnership (Epstein, 2004). However, with any partnership, there is frequently differing views on values, expectations, cultural beliefs, and acceptable norms. These can lead to problems in the formation and sustaining of the partnership, and compromise is often required by one or both parties. The establishment of home-school partnerships are no different, accept schools have to navigate a way in which they can connect with all the parent and whānau members at a level, and in a way that is meaningful and shows respect.

2.2.2 Characteristics:

Looking at home-school partnerships in more depth, it is apparent that the nature and type of partnership that develops will determine how effective it will be (Education Review Office, 2016), with some even being counterproductive (Robinson et al., 2007).

For schools, many factors need to be considered when establishing effective partnerships. Robinson et al. (2007) suggest that home-school partnerships are best characterised by (i).

Treating families with both dignity and respect (ii). Schools running programmes that support current family practices, not undermine them (iii). Clear, concise communication with specific information and suggestions as opposed to just giving general advice (iv). Opportunities for parents and whānau to be involved as part of a group as well as having one-to-one contact with the school. All of these reflect the goodwill and best practice on behalf of the school. However, Berg, Melaville, and Blank (2006) believe that an effective home-school partnership should be characterised in a more balanced manner with: effective two-way communication; the sharing of responsibilities and resources; the building of capacity in all parties, and in the development of a safe, supportive climate, one in which both home and school are working together, and which allows students to connect into a broader, richer, learning environment.

Berryman (2014), believes the foundation to all effective home-school partnerships can be encapsulated in traditional concepts (fig.1) which hold significant importance to Māori in New Zealand. Many of which are now utilised in schools as a guide to ensure practices are both respectful and culturally inclusive, while they are also providing a means to look holistic at the institution and the roles of all the contributing partners.

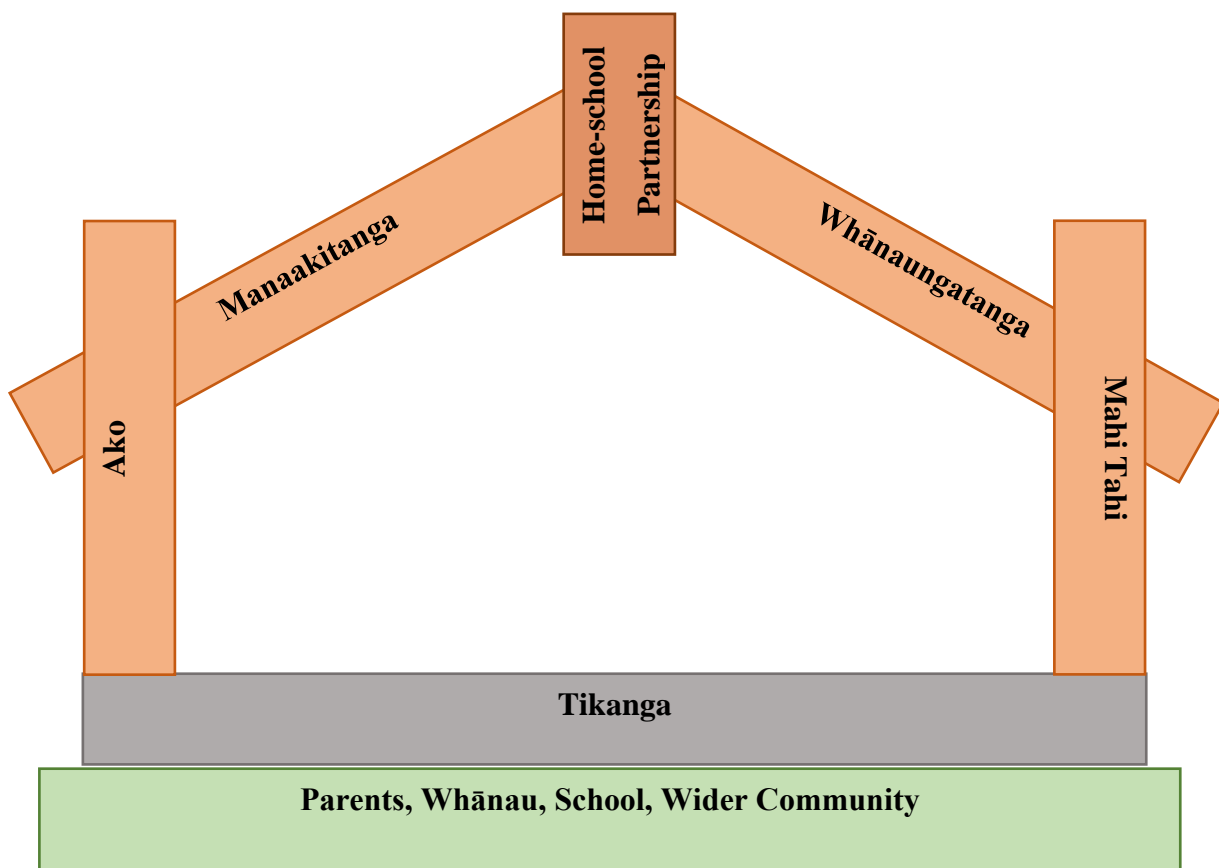


Figure 1 - Traditional Māori concepts that support home-school partnerships.

The concepts of Tikanga, Kotahitanga, Mahi Tahi, Manaakitanga, Whānaungatanga, and Ako are explored further as they are perceived not only to underpin all relationships but through their effective implementation ‘engagement’ and the benefits deriving from it, will be forthcoming (Education Review Office, 2016).

Tikanga

When looking at values and customs that guide life and the way things are done, many cultures or religions have various doctrine that layout 'the right way'. For Māori, this is Tikanga and represents what is seen as both correct and appropriate (Metge, 1995). While Tikanga is often localised to embody the customs and values of individual iwi (tribes), it also reflects people doing things in a way that is seen as morally, spiritually, and socially appropriate by all Māori.

Culturally responsive schools often choose to let the tikanga of their local iwi guide them on issues of cultural significance, and in other areas of school life. Alternately, schools can develop their own tikanga to reflect the values and beliefs of both the school and the wider community and to guide how they do things in their unique setting.

Kotahitanga

Kotahitanga is achieved when everyone is united for the realisation of a shared objective (Berryman, 2014), and is a state that can continue well beyond when the goal has been reached (Education Review Office, 2016). In a school setting, when parents have taken ownership, they are actively engaged with decision making and have a true sense of belonging Kotahitanga has been achieved (Berryman & Ford, 2014).

Mahi Tahi

Mahi tahi like kotahitanga describes group unity, but where kotahitanga is a state that is achieved, mahi tahi represents the unity during the process of working collaboratively towards a shared goal, often in a hands-on fashion (Robinson et al., 2007).

Mahi tahi is, therefore seen as a powerful means of creating solidarity (kotahitanga). In an education context, it would be expressed in a partnership where work has gone into the development of a home-school partnership; where power is shared equally between the schools and home (Peterson, 2003), and where the collaboration is focused on the attainment of learner-centred education goals (Education Review Office, 2016).

Manaakitanga

Manaakitanga describes the right and obligation of a host to care for the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual wellbeing of visitors. When people come into schools, whether they are parents, whānau or members of the public, it falls on the school to show respect, generosity and care for their needs (Education Review Office, 2016).

According to Bishop (2006), having a relationship based around respect is essential for parent's and whānau to not only feel welcome and connected, but also for their child to develop and succeed. In a school context manaakitanga occurs when senior leaders show respect to all parents and whānau by welcoming them; developing a deeper understanding of who they are; seeking their input on significant school matters, and providing opportunities for them to contribute and become part of the wider school community. This approach helps establish and sustain a strong connection with parents and whānau, looking after their wellbeing and securing a partnership that works together.

Whānaungatanga

Whānaungatanga is a process where links and connections are made when people come together as a means of discovering whakapapa (genealogical) linkage. This process is conducted in a culturally appropriate manner and helps people to identify shared heritages, areas of engagement, or other relationships (Berryman, 2014).

Developing these connections has several benefits. On the one hand, they remind all members in the partnership, biologically related or otherwise, that the relationship is reciprocal and that they have an obligation and responsibility to support each other (Berryman, Nevin, et al., 2015; Education Review Office, 2016). It also provides a sense of family connection, which nurtures a mutually respectful and collaborative relationship (Berg et al., 2006). Whānaungatanga is also seen as part of the foundation 'necessary' for effectively teaching Māori students and improving engagement with their families (Education Review Office, 2016).

Ako

Ako is the concept of reciprocal teaching and learning void of any power relationship (Education Review Office, 2016), which can further strengthen home-school connections. It focuses on learning as a dual experience in which a person can be both teacher and learner. In the context of a home-school partnership, one example of this could be where both parties

share and learn from each other, mirroring the same effective strategy used to facilitate student learning (Robinson et al., 2007).

2.2.3 Benefits:

Both research and policy propose that the benefits of home-school partnerships are many and varied, with positive consequences stemming from engagement for both parties.

Spreading the load and opening doors

Meaningful engagement with parents and whānau reduces some of the weight of responsibility that principals and other leaders bear when operating a school (Berg et al., 2006). Through the selected distribution of responsibilities and by including parents and whānau in the decision-making process, school leaders are empowering others to help with the development and maintenance of the school. It also presents schools with greater access to a wider range of resources within the community that can support what is happening in the school (Education Review Office, 2016; Robinson et al., 2007). It also affords connections that can be drawn upon to aid in the resolution of any issues that may arise (Fan & Chen, 2001).

Raised student achievement

Raising student achievement is a major focus for the Ministry of Education in New Zealand (Education Review Office, 2016; New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2015), and one in which the involvement of parents and whānau is seen as essential to that success (Berryman, Eley, Ford, & Egan, 2015). Home-school engagement has been shown to have a statistically significant association with raising student achievement (Berryman, 2014), and engagement in class (Boonk, Gijssels, Ritzen, & Brand-Gruwel, 2018). Caution must however be taken when drawing conclusions, either positive or negative, regarding the relationship between parental engagement and students' academic achievement due to inconsistencies in findings (McNeal, 2012). Fan and Chen (2001) highlight that the practice of using generalised definitions to describe parent and whānau engagement in research is both misleading, and does not specify which types of involvement have contributed to achievement in different learning areas.

Greater ownership and stronger communities

Home-school partnerships open the doorway for guidance to come from the community on cultural and spiritual matters which may be required when the school is developing practices

to establish and sustain an inclusive and respectful environment (Berryman, 2014). Schools benefit by providing parents and whānau with these and other opportunities to contribute. It not only supports the development of solid connections (Education Review Office, 2016) but also leads to stronger communities (Epstein, 2004). It is only once a strong home-school partnership has been established, where parents and whānau are viewed, and view themselves, as being part of the school (Berryman, 2014), does it become possible for them to positively shape and influence the lives of their children and the direction of the school (Berg et al., 2006).

Further benefits from having home-school partnerships

Having parents and whānau working in partnership with schools sends powerful messages to children that education is important and valued by their family (Berg et al., 2006). This perception often leads to students trying harder (Epstein, 2004), connect better with teachers (Berg et al., 2006), and positively affect their academic and social development (Robinson et al., 2007).

2.2.4 Ingredients for success:

Valuing people

Successful home-school partnerships start with people respecting and looking upon each other as unique individuals, with both differences and strengths that have the potential to positively impact others. The school must, however, be careful not to categorise certain groups of people, especially immigrants, as being the same. Boonk et al. (2018) warn that doing so runs the danger of being inadequately prepared and unable to meet people's needs.

Trust and good communication

Further to valuing people's uniqueness, understanding and respecting the cultural values, beliefs, and practices that each individual brings to a partnership as a reflection of who they are is essential. When the values and beliefs of home and school are not aligned there is often mistrust and misunderstandings (Berryman, 2014). To go some way towards addressing these potential issues, parents and whānau must be involved in conversations about their child and what is happening at school (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2014). It is through strengthening these lines of communication (Bull, 2011) that schools will develop a better-shared understanding, and greater buy-in from parents and whānau when new initiatives are being proposed (Quezada, 2016). The key, however, according to Berryman

(2014), is that schools need to first listen to parents and whānau rather than telling them what they want or are planning to do.

Supporting growth and raising expectations

Another vital ingredient of a successful home-school partnership is to support the growth and development of the people in it. Providing parents and whānau with a basic understanding of what their child is doing and why (Boonk et al., 2018), along with skills and knowledge on how to set up a work environment and support learning from home (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2014). This sharing of knowledge will again strengthen the bonds of the partnership while also facilitating the reinforcement of strategies employed at school but in the home context (Robinson et al., 2007).

Additionally, by ‘training’ parents and whānau, schools will be inadvertently instilling in them the value of learning, expanding their estimation of what their child is capable of, and raising their expectations for their child’s educational achievement (Robinson et al., 2007).

Having a vision to share

Fundament to bringing people together in a home-school partnership is having a vision for the school, with outcomes that will positively impact the lives of students, parent and whānau and the wider community (Robinson et al., 2007). This vision needs to be developed with the community so that it reflects the values of the community (Education Review Office, 2016) while generating stimulated collective efforts (Fullan, 2011), and affording parents and whānau the opportunity to be involved in decision making.

2.2.5 Challenges

The challenges to home-school partnerships are similar to the benefits in that they are many and varied. The very nature of joining together large groups of people with different ethnicities, cultures, religions, values, beliefs, genders, and ages is always going to be problematic. The challenges facing most schools relate to the attitudes and perceptions of both parties in the partnership. School staff can often have stereotypes towards specific groups, predominantly non-dominant cultures (Lyutykh, Strickland, Fasoli, & Adera, 2016), which can negatively impact on their ability to work together as equals. This is compounded further when there is a disparity between the multi-cultural perspectives of the diverse home population and the often mono-cultural perspective of schools (Lyutykh et al., 2016), which explains why so many parents and whānau, particularly those from a

non-dominant culture do not feel welcome in schools (Bishop & New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2003).

2.3 Parents and Whānau

2.3.1 Definition:

New Zealand has a vibrant and diverse population, made up predominantly of people from either Māori, Polynesian or European descent, however, with an ever-increasing, wide-ranging immigrant population (Kugler, 2012) New Zealand has become a country of many races and cultures, all of which are represented by the children that attend the schools. The parents and whānau of these children may or may not be biologically related to them, but they are the people who care for them and may actively participate in their education (Boonk et al., 2018).

2.3.2 Characteristics:

Parents feel obligated to take responsibility for their child's learning (Bishop & New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2003). They have been the most significant influence in their child's life, and they were their first teachers (Berg et al., 2006). As children transition to school, parents and whānau still want to be supportive of their education, being actively involved within the school, supporting their child's learning and those responsible for it. (Bishop & New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2003).

What it is to be 'Whānau.'

Whānau is a term that is often translated to mean 'extended family' or 'family group' (Education Review Office, 2016). However, it was traditionally the primary economic unit in Māori society (Education Review Office, 2016), beneath Hapu and Iwi which are larger tribal structures within Māori culture, and represents a concept of whānau, rather than a single word definition. It incorporates all the people who are seen as 'kin', biologically related or not, as being connected, through which the day to day tasks undertaken in traditional Māori society are conducted, including schooling, and could take on the form of the whole community in which the person lives being involved in caring and supporting an individual. The concept of Whānau also carries with it a bond that signifies a duty of care for all members to nurture and support those being cared for.

Mana Whenua

The concept of Mana Whenua acknowledges the indigenous people of the land as the tribal guardians of that land, which for many Māori is the land that their ancestors settled and is seen as their continued connection to them and their whakapapa (genealogical roots).

While mana whenua may no longer own the land, as tribal guardians of it, they are still acknowledged and respected in that role. Therefore, whatever happens on that land should ideally involve the active participation and commitment of the mana whenua (Berryman, 2014). This includes engaging with schools, and in their role as parents and whānau, developing reciprocal relationships and supporting one another (Berryman, 2014).

Diverse cultures

Many principals consider diversity in schools to be both a strength and a challenge (Berg et al., 2006). As mentioned earlier, there is often a disparity between many home cultures and the mono-cultural perspectives and structuring of the education system (Lyutykh et al., 2016). This disparity not only makes it hard for parents, whānau, and students to feel comfortable and ‘belong’ at schools (Berryman, 2014), but these differences extend to a lack of understanding regarding perspectives and experiences, which if looked at innovatively by schools could be used to enrich its cultural context to reflect their client base better. Unfortunately, due to the sensitive nature of this relationship, assumptions are formed, often incorrectly, rather than navigating awkward conversations (Berg et al., 2006).

It is essential that whenever a school is engaging with students and families that they are mindful and respecting of, the culture and needs of the people. For example, when Māori children are at school, they are perceived to be still connected to their whānau and their culture and cannot be viewed separately from them (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2014). To do so would be to deny them and their families of their right to be who they are, and the opportunity to learn as culturally centred individuals. (Bishop & New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2003). As previously mentioned, schools have traditionally been a mono-cultural environment that does not (or would not) entertain other cultural beliefs, often because there has not been, within leadership, the capacity to embrace such diversity, or because there was no desire to embrace such diversity.

With the number of immigrant families increasing in New Zealand, schools must understand the perspectives and experiences that parents and whānau are operating under. Kugler (2012) refers to four stages of parent involvement that represent the level to which immigrant families might operate. These are cultural survivor; cultural learner; cultural connector; and cultural leader. In their view cultural survivors are still focused on the basic needs of their family and unlikely to become involved; cultural learners are more adjusted to their new life and actively engaged in learning about their child's education; cultural connectors seek out information regarding what is being taught, and learning how to navigate the school system; cultural leaders are engaging fully in their child's education, further developing their knowledge, and providing support for other parents.

Varying educational background and economic situations

Research suggests that student achievement is higher for the children of well-educated parents and whānau who engage with schools and actively participate in their child's learning (Pomerantz, Moorman, & Litwack, 2007). However, it has also been shown that this phenomenon becomes non-existent when parent engagement is high (Boonk et al., 2018). Similarly, family income is also deemed not an accurate predictor of achievement outcomes when parents and whānau have a high level of engagement with schools (Berg et al., 2006).

2.3.3 Motivations to engage with schools:

There are many reasons why parents and whānau choose to get involved in the educational life of their child. For many, it is intrinsically an extension of the tasks they have always done. However, it does provide some specific rewards that increase the benefits of engagement.

Parent and whānau want the best for their children, and being involved, with both high expectations and strong aspirations for their child's success (Fan & Chen, 2001; Robinson et al., 2007) has a significant impact on educational achievement (Berryman, Eley, et al., 2015). It has also been shown that these high expectations have a positive effect on student achievement, regardless of parent and whānau education levels or ethnicity (Boonk et al., 2018). While the aspirational value that parents and whānau place on education highlights to children the importance of school (Bishop, 2006; Pomerantz et al., 2007), and is critical in developing a similar belief in their child (Kugler, 2012).

Engagement also provides parents and whānau with the opportunity to monitor the wellbeing of their child; access to a greater understanding of their child's educational needs, and allows them to be linked to the principal means of socialisation for their child (Kugler, 2012). For themselves, engagement provides parents and whānau with a sense of community (Talò, 2018) as they interact with school staff and other families, and a sense of contribution as they actively get involved and look after part of their community (Talò, 2018).

2.4 School Senior Leadership

2.4.1 Definition:

According to Leithwood, Jantzi, and Steinbach (1999), there is no agreed or clear definition of 'school leadership', however, later Leithwood (Mulford, Silins, & Leithwood, 2004) changed that stance and espoused that school leaders are those people that are responsible for setting the direction of the school, developing its people, and redesigning and improving the organisation. Leadership, therefore, hold a certain level of influence within schools, usually based on positional authority, personal characteristics, and the quality of their ideas (Robinson et al., 2007).

The formal leadership responsibilities are usually held by those in senior and middle management roles. However, schools with a distributed leadership approach, or are located in small-town or rural schools, where staffing is low, may often share out some of the lower responsibilities to ensure coverage and help build leadership capacity.

These responsibilities may include the role of engaging with parents and whānau for a range of reasons. However, while they should be encouraging meaningful family engagement many leaders, especially those new to their role, do not feel adequately prepared to work and engage with parents and whānau (Berg et al., 2006), as they often lack interpersonal skills and are faced with an increasingly diverse student population, high demands from the government to be culturally inclusive while reducing disparity.

2.4.2 Characteristics:

A competent leader must possess the knowledge and abilities to effectively undertake their most important tasks (Witziers, Bosker, & Krüger, 2003). Strong interpersonal skills, mixed with the ability to share information, collaborate, and work collectively with various ethnicities, cultures, and religions (Berg et al., 2006) is essential.

The right mindset is another strength for any leader to possess. Their ability to transition between their role of influencing and being open to the influences of those they interact with is vital (Berg et al., 2006), while it also encourages reciprocal learning-centred relationships – Ako (Education Review Office, 2016).

Leaders must place a high value on parent participation and not see it as a burden on their time or a challenge to their authority, but part of an ongoing process to strengthen the school (Berg et al., 2006). They must also be mindful of the demands they are placing on parents and whānau, conscious of their other responsibilities beyond the school and their access to resources (Lyutykh et al., 2016).

Consequently, the role of leadership in developing the conditions for collaboration is critical (Fullan, 2011), without which parents and whānau will not feel they and their diverse background are welcome (Berg et al., 2006), reducing the chances of participation and buy-in when engagement initiatives are introduced (Quezada, 2016).

2.4.3 Roles and responsibilities:

Senior leaders play a significant part in setting the school climate to facilitate successful outcomes (Witziers et al., 2003). The main roles necessary to accomplish this are the development of a vision along with the strategic plan to achieve it, the framing of goals, coordinating the curriculum, setting high expectations of both teachers and for student achievement, and building collaborative partnerships with parents, whānau and the wider community (Witziers et al., 2003). They are also responsible for effecting change, developing staff, managing public relations and liaising with the community (Berg et al., 2006).

Effective leadership act intentionally, always mindful of the context of the school, and holistically viewing how all change and interactions linked to the school vision (Witziers et al., 2003). Proactive also in maximising the opportunities within the school and wider communities to access expertise and resources that can increase the depth of learning to enhance student achievement and wellbeing. (Education Review Office, 2016).

Berg et al. (2006) believe the following key tasks are fundamental for effective community engagement: 1. Create a vision; 2. Bring people together - sharing the leadership; 3. Know your community; 4. Address any elephants in the room relating to diversity

Creating a vision

Every community is unique, and consequently, every school partnership needs to create their own vision of what learning and success will look like for them (Berg et al., 2006). School leaders, therefore, must enter into a two-way interaction with their communities, combining values, beliefs, knowledge, information and expertise (Welch, 2016) to establish a ‘compelling vision’ (Education Review Office, 2016). From which strategies are developed, goals are set, and resources aligned (Education Review Office, 2016).

Bringing people together

It is the school leaderships responsibility to communicate and promote the vision of the school and align parent and whānau engagement strategies to facilitate a successful outcome (Robinson et al., 2007). Schools, however, often struggle in this area, unable to communicate with neither their school nor wider communities in a way that is meaningful or elicits positive engagement (Bull, 2011).

A further responsibility of school leadership is to support both parents and whānau, and school staff to distinguish between assumptions and facts relating to culture (Berg et al., 2006). This requires leaders themselves to have a good understanding of the realities in which their parents and whānau are situated, socially, economically and culturally (Berg et al., 2006).

Know your community

School leaders must be active participants in the events of their community (Berg et al., 2006). Their actions send a strong message to parents and whānau, and role models what engagement can look like. Furthermore, it opens up opportunities to talk, seek their ideas and suggestions, while strengthening relationships in what is likely a safe environment for them (Peterson, 2003).

Addressing the elephants and valuing diversity

Different school cultures can have a direct impact on student outcomes, and it is, therefore, necessary that one of the senior leaders’ key roles is in developing and sustaining these cultures (Witziers et al., 2003). Leaders must gain an understanding of the needs and experiences of all parents and whānau to truly appreciate where they are situated, what support is required for them and what opportunities, through engagement, exist for both parties (Boonk et al., 2018). Conversations may also need to be held to distinguish between

cultural assumptions and cultural facts (Berg et al., 2006), and in the quest to provide an inclusive environment for all families school leaders must focus on the development of both language-appropriate and culturally appropriate practices (Kugler, 2012) and strategies (Department of Education).

2.5 Engagement

2.5.1 Definition:

Engagement is one of those words whose meaning can represent many different things, take various forms (Welch, 2016), and is often used interchangeably in life, and literature with other terms and concepts (Bull, 2011). In the context of education, people often perceive communication or involvement as engagement, and while both of these are forms of engagement, they only represent a way of connecting. Engagement itself is a concept where different groups or individuals interact in various ways to form a connection that is reciprocal and mutually beneficial for a specific purpose (Welch, 2016).

The success of any engagement between schools and parents and whānau will be determined by how effective it is, in terms of achieving outcomes, utilising the resources available (Bull, 2011), valuing the people involved (Robinson et al., 2007), and by how clearly the engagement is defined and understood by everyone involved (Welch, 2016). How parents and whānau engage is also a significant determining factor in the overall success of the engagement (Pomerantz et al., 2007). Is the engagement based at school with leaders and teachers, or is it conducted at home working alongside their child to support them in their learning? Are these interactions occurring naturally through a genuine desire by parents and whānau to be involved in the education of their child or are they based around interventions set up by the school to draw parents and whānau in where connections are then made and further involvement encouraged (Pomerantz et al., 2007)?

While there is often a clear desire for parents and whānau to want to help and be involved in their child's learning and success at school, being able to participate authentically, having their culture both valued and welcomed within schools is also crucial in how successful that engagement will be (Bishop, 2006). This acknowledgement of whom they are and valuing what is important to them is particularly true for Māori, and when combined with the

opportunity to be involved in decision making, increases both presence and engagement (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2014).

Engagement can also be viewed in terms of ‘what you put in determines what you get out’. Welch (2016) uses the terms “thin” and “thick” engagement. Where thin engagement reflects a minimal amount of effort and resources committed, resulting in limited engagement; as opposed to thick engagement where meaningful and intentional work is conducted, and the outcomes are indicative of this.

2.5.2 Benefits

Improved student achievement

Traditionally schools have worked independently and not encouraged or requested the participation of parents and whānau other than for basic supportive tasks (Bull, Brooking, & Campbell, 2008). This is no longer the case, and it is now seen as desirable for schools to have closer links with the parents and whānau of their students as these partnerships have been shown to improve schools (Epstein, 2004).

Engagement with parents and whānau has a significant effect on the achievements of their children (Bull et al., 2008; Epstein, 2004) and can be directly linked to improved learning outcomes which school’s on their own often struggle to achieve (Biddulph et al., 2003). These benefits are also why many parents and whānau are choosing to be more actively involved with the education of their children (Pomerantz et al., 2007).

In addition to improving achievement outcomes, engagement also helps students develop themselves socially and emotionally (Pomerantz et al., 2007), motivating them to advance with their education (Berg et al., 2006), and providing them with the reassurance that they have support to draw upon when faced with challenges in their learning (Pomerantz et al., 2007).

Empowered parent and whānau community

Home-school engagement extends beyond involvement, to empowering parents and whānau so they can influence and improve the learning outcomes and wellbeing of their child at school (Department of Education). While most participation is aimed at encouraging parents and whānau to become involved in their children’s learning, it is also an opportunity for them to develop various skills and knowledge of their own relating to education (Wainwright & Marandet, 2017). These then equip parents and whānau so they can effectively plan and

monitor their child's learning (Pomerantz et al., 2007), and be more able to express their views and communicate with the school (Quezada, 2016). This engagement also facilitates a sharing of power within a collaborative partnership (Berryman, 2014) and develops a greater sense of connectedness (Pomerantz et al., 2007).

2.5.3 Challenges

There is a range of reason why parents and whānau choose not to engage with schools. Most are based around either personal situations, previous experiences, or attitudes and opinions of the school and those people currently running it. Lyutykh et al. (2016) believe that the availability of skills, knowledge, time and energy are determining factors in whether or not parents and whānau engage with their child's school. The cost of modern-day living often requires both parents to be out working, which means that there is less time for them to participate in activities either with or regarding their children. What this means for schools is that they must, therefore, design and deliver engagement initiatives in a way that suits, and fits in with family lifestyles.

Negative experiences, either recent or from when they were at school, play a significant role in whether parents and whānau choose to now engage with schools, and to what extent that will be (Berg et al., 2006). For some, they have never felt that they or their culture have been welcome. Even when directly invited, there are trust issues around the real purpose of the request, and making connections is limited to only being with those people that are known to the families (Bishop, 2006).

Some parents and whānau also see the process of engagement as 'impersonal' and 'lacking clarity', particularly in regards to some of the methods used to engage with them, and when talking with leaders (Bishop, 2006).

Bishop (2006) further emphasise that for many Māori parents and whānau, engagement does not occur because their past experiences have left them either lacking confidence and unable to speak up, or they feel they are not respected for who they are, which could also be true for many non-Māori parents and whānau.

For immigrant families, there are frequently issues with race, class, language barriers and cultural differences to deal with (Berg et al., 2006). It is often the culture shock of navigating new systems that stops them from engaging with schools (Lyutykh et al., 2016). What is done in New Zealand school's is different from what they are used to in their

home country, and consequently, they are left unsure of how to engage. Additional causes for non-engagement relate to parents and whānau being overwhelmed by the expectations required of them, especially if they have come from cultures in which engagement is not a common practice (Lyutykh et al., 2016).

2.5.4 Methods of engagement

Pomerantz et al. (2007) assert that ‘how’ parents and whānau are engaged relates directly to the effectiveness of their engagement. Various approaches need to be taken when engaging with parents and whānau, and all depend on what outcome is desired. For example in regards to improving home and school alignment, enhancing communication by using systems that make information clearer, involving whānau in school style activities so they can mirror these at home, and empowering parents and whānau by giving them a voice in the decision making process around what will be taught could all be seen as ways of addressing the same issue (Bull, 2011). Unfortunately, however, much of research only suggests ‘what’ to do in terms of engagement with parents and whānau (e.g. build relational trust), and not specifically ‘how’ to do it (e.g. conduct face to face discussions with parents and whānau to identify priorities in their child’s learning).

Every school and community are different, and therefore the best ways of ‘how’ schools could engage will be determined by constraints or factors that are unique or most suited to that specific context (Berg et al., 2006). For that reason, and due to the lack of research on how to correctly carry out engagement, this review will focus on the broader consideration of what should be done in the first instance. In the hope that by developing this understanding, the specifics of how to engage can then be explored and contextualised on a case by case basis to be more effective.

Much of what needs to be done by schools to ensure effective engagement occurs can be derived from the characteristics that make up strong home-school partnerships. Some of these include: establishing clear two-way communication; building strong, authentic connections; providing opportunities for parents and whānau to be involved in the growth and development of the school (Robinson et al., 2007), facilitating one on one contact opportunities; distributing responsibilities and sharing resources (Berg et al., 2006), building relational trust, listening actively, responding to the needs of parents and whānau (Berryman, 2014; Education Review Office, 2016).

Kugler (2012) also promotes the need to educate parent and whānau on a range of topics that relate to how the school operates, how they can monitor their child's progress, and how they can support their learning. They also stipulate that this needs to be delivered in a language and way that parents and whānau understand (Kugler, 2012).

Caution must be taken, as evidence shows that not all engagement has a positive effect (McNeal, 2012). In table 1 Boonk et al. (2018) illustrate that while there are many different ways parents and whānau can be involved in the education of their child, both at home and school (Pomerantz et al., 2007), some do have a negative effect on an outcome. In this case, the focus is on the relationship between involvement and achievement, and interestingly some of the methods of involvement shown in this example (Volunteer at school, and participation in school events) have both a positive and a negative effect on achievement. Whether or not this phenomenon would be repeated when comparing the effects of how various methods of engagement impact on other outcomes, is unclear. Again, there is limited research in this area to provide a definitive answer. What could be suggested is that, regardless of the effects, the results for each school, given their unique institutional culture and context, are likely to be different, even if the same methods and outcomes are compared. The implications of this are that schools need to be very mindful of which methods they choose to use or encourage, understanding the potential consequences, and the impact on outcomes.

Table 1 - Impact of home and school-based involvement on student achievement.

Home and School-Based Involvement	
Positive relation with achievement from home:	Positive relation with achievement from school:
High parental expectations and aspirations	Volunteer at school
Valuing academic achievement and reinforce learning at home	Participation in school events (attending events, help with fundraising)
Academic encouragement and support	Visit the classroom
Parent-child educational discussions	Attend group meetings at school or with teachers and other staff.
Negative relation with achievement from home:	Negative relation with achievement from school:
Academic pressure	Participation in school events (attending events, help with fundraising)
Parental control	Visit the classroom
Parental interference with homework	Attend group meetings at school or with teachers and other staff.

Homework-related conflict	
Checking of homework	
Homework control	
Help with homework	
Volunteer at school	
Contact with the school on child academic outcomes	

(Boonk et al., 2018)

2.5.5 Types of engagement

Having explored what engagement is and what it might look like in both schools and at home, we now explore how engagement can be broken down into different types. These represent the stages of progression which parents and whānau traverse with their child's school, building Mahi Tahi (powerful working partnerships) and towards Kotahitanga (unity and ownership by all partners). The three types of engagement are: Stage one: involvement; stage two: empowerment; stage three: solidarity.

Involvement

Involvement is a concept that has been evaluated and applied extensively in many different ways. It is now at the point where it is often unclear what the concept means or looks like (Boonk et al., 2018). In schools, involvement is synonymous with the term 'support' and can be seen as the mechanisms that allow parents and whānau to gain accurate information about what and how their child is learning and progressing, and how best they can support their learning from home (Pomerantz et al., 2007). It can also take on the form of parents and whānau actively participating in activities, discussions, and applying strategies, both at home and at school, that may or may not be directly related to the education of their child (see Table 2).

Table 2 - Home-based and School-based involvement strategies to support child learning.

Home-based and School-based involvement strategies to support child learning	
Home-based involvement:	School-based involvement:
Educational expectations/aspirations	Attendance at Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) meetings
Valuing of education/academic achievement	Volunteering at school
Reading with children	Visiting the classroom
Educational trips (going to the library or the museum)	Attendance at school or class events

Parent-child discussions about school experiences	Participation in school functions (such as membership in PTA)
Parent-child discussions about selecting courses/programs	Teacher-parent communication about academic performance
Parent-child discussions about post-high school plans	Teacher-parent communication about problems or difficulties at school
Academic pressure/control	
Engagement in learning activities at home	
Assistance/help with homework	
Parental support/encouragement in learning	
Rules for TV/parental limit-setting	

(Boonk et al., 2018)

As children grow and develop involvement also often changes to reflect the needs within the partnership. While the motivation is still present the requirements, especially on parents and whānau, shifts and involvement can take on another form (Boonk et al., 2018). In terms of their involvement to supporting their child's academic achievement, parents and whānau may initially be involved in many of the activities that support their child's transition into the school, mirroring school practices to reinforce and support learning, and liaising with the school to monitor progress. As their child gets older, this involvement may shift to becoming more focused on creating the conditions that allow learning to occur rather than participating in it (Boonk et al., 2018).

Additionally, Pomerantz et al. (2007) identify that when parent and whānau involvement occurs naturally, there are generally greater benefits than when it is packaged and promoted to them.

Empowerment

Empowerment is associated with enabling people by providing a certain level of control, power or authority in and over a situation (Pomerantz et al., 2007) which further provides them with a sense of confidence, contribution and usefulness (Talò, 2018). Empowerment also fosters a sense of ownership (Brewster & Railsback, 2003) which carries with a sense of belonging.

In education, it is important that parents and whānau feel empowered (Pomerantz et al., 2007). They come into schools knowing little about how they are structured, resourced and operate, and are unaware of what their child needs to be successful (Johnson, 2012). Empowering parents and whānau with the skills and knowledge necessary to support learning at home (Education Review Office, 2016) is essential. It is also through this

knowledge that they gain the confidence and understanding to be actively involved in decision-making and become influential in the school system (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2014). The new knowledge also helps them become aware of the malleability of their child's abilities, removing pressure and expectations on them and their performance (Pomerantz et al., 2007).

Solidarity

Kotahitanga is the Māori concept which epitomises the coming together of people in solidarity, unity and oneness (Metge, 1995). It reflects the enduring connections (Berryman, Nevin, et al., 2015) that have been forged through Mahi Tahi (shared experiences and working together) which provides people with a sense of belonging (Berryman, 2014).

"If parents fail to see local schools as 'their' schools, they will be less likely to give schools, and the children attending them the support they need and deserve"
(Johnson, 2012, p.8)

As Johnson points out, if schools do not place a high priority on making parents and whānau feel welcome, empowering them with knowledge and through decision-making opportunities, then the trust and connections that serve as the platform towards a sense of ownership and belong will not be there, and neither will the support of parents and whānau.

2.5.6 Existing frameworks

All parent and whānau engagement requires a clear structure, a shared understanding of what is taking place and a vision that shows why it is important (Quezada, 2016). The following frameworks characterise what schools need to focus on and develop in terms of strategies and practices when engaging with parents and whānau. Some focus on specific aspects of engagement, e.g. 'involvement' to guide how to develop and strengthen home-school partnerships. In contrast, other aspects take on more of a holistic view where the strategies and practices are either seen to wrap around the learner who is central to the vision or as a checklist to evaluate performance.

Epstein's Framework of Six Types of Involvement

In Epstein's framework, schools are encouraged to link various aspects of the schools learning community to the goals of the school through organised engagement programs

(Epstein, 2004). The framework begins by outlining the objectives for each initiative, with supporting ‘samples’ of the types of practices that could be followed to achieve a successful outcome. Possible challenges are also identified along with potential outcomes for students, parents, and teachers. The framework presented in table 3 is a condensed version that only includes the main descriptors of each involvement initiative and the potential outcomes for parents.

Table 3 - Epstein's six types of involvement.

Main descriptors of involvement	Potential outcomes for parents
Parenting. Assist families with parenting skills, family support, understanding child and adolescent development, and setting home conditions to support learning at each age and grade level. Assist schools in understanding families' backgrounds, cultures, and goals for children.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Understanding of and confidence about parenting, child and adolescent development, and changes in home conditions for learning as children proceed through school. * Awareness of own and others' challenges in parents. * Feeling of support from school and other parents.
Communicating. Communicate with families about school programs and student progress. Create two-way communication channels between school and home.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Understanding school programs and policies. * Monitoring and awareness of the child's progress. * Responding effectively to students' problems. * Interactions with teachers and ease of communication with school and teachers.
Volunteering. Improve recruitment, training, activities, and schedules to involve families as volunteers and as audiences at the school or in other locations. Enable educators to work with volunteers who support students and the school.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Understanding teacher's job, increased comfort in school, and carry-over of school activities at home. * Self-confidence about ability to work in school and with children or to take steps to improve own education. * Awareness that families are welcome and valued at school. * Gains in specific skills of volunteer work.
Learning at Home. Involve families with their children in academic learning at home, including homework, goal setting, and other curriculum-related activities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Know how to support, encourage, and help the student at home each year. * Discussions of school, classwork, and homework. * Understanding of instructional program each year and of what child is learning in each subject. * Appreciation of teaching skills. * Awareness of the child as a learner.
Decision Making. Include families as participants in school decisions, governance, and advocacy activities through school councils or improvement teams, committees, and parent organisations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Input into policies that affect a child's education. * Feeling of ownership of the school. * Awareness of parents' voices in school decisions. * Shared experiences and connections with other families. * Awareness of school, district, and state policies.
Collaborating with the Community. Coordinate resources and services for families, students, and the school with community groups, including businesses, agencies, cultural and civic organisations, and colleges or universities. Enable all to contribute service to the community.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Knowledge and use of local resources by family and child to increase skills and talents or to obtain needed services * Interactions with other families in community activities. * Awareness of the school's role in the community and community's contributions to the school.

(Epstein, 2004)

While this framework helps create a clear structure for schools to follow when trying to engage with parents and whānau, it does not appear to link the various objectives in a manner that might suggest a pathway for parents and whānau to increase their input and influence regarding the education of their child and the growth of the school. Fan and Chen (2001) also point out that Epstein's research is predominantly focused on what teachers can do to improve involvement at their level, and not what senior leaders can do to improve or encourage engagement at the level where parent and whānau participation can help shape the growth and direction of the school.

ERO - evaluation indicators framework

This framework (see fig.2) incorporates different layers of influence that are seen as essential for schools to be providing, so that the learner, who is at the centre, is fully supported. Primarily support comes through educationally powerful connections and relationships which represent the partnership between parents, whānau and the school. These are then wrapped within the concepts of Mahi Tahi, Manaakitanga, Whānaungatanga and Ako. All of which focus on building and strengthen the two-way partnership between home and school to further ensure the learner is supported within an environment set up for their success.

The emphasis is on creating strong, inclusive, and respectful partnerships, especially the type that have been proven to work for Māori and immigrant parents and whānau. However, while it conceptualises what needs to be included in a comprehensive system to support the success of learners, it lacks any detail of what could or should be used in terms of approaches and practices to achieve the desired outcomes. Additionally, it provides no structure for schools that can help guide and support the growth of parents and whānau to build their capacity and sense of ownership with the school.

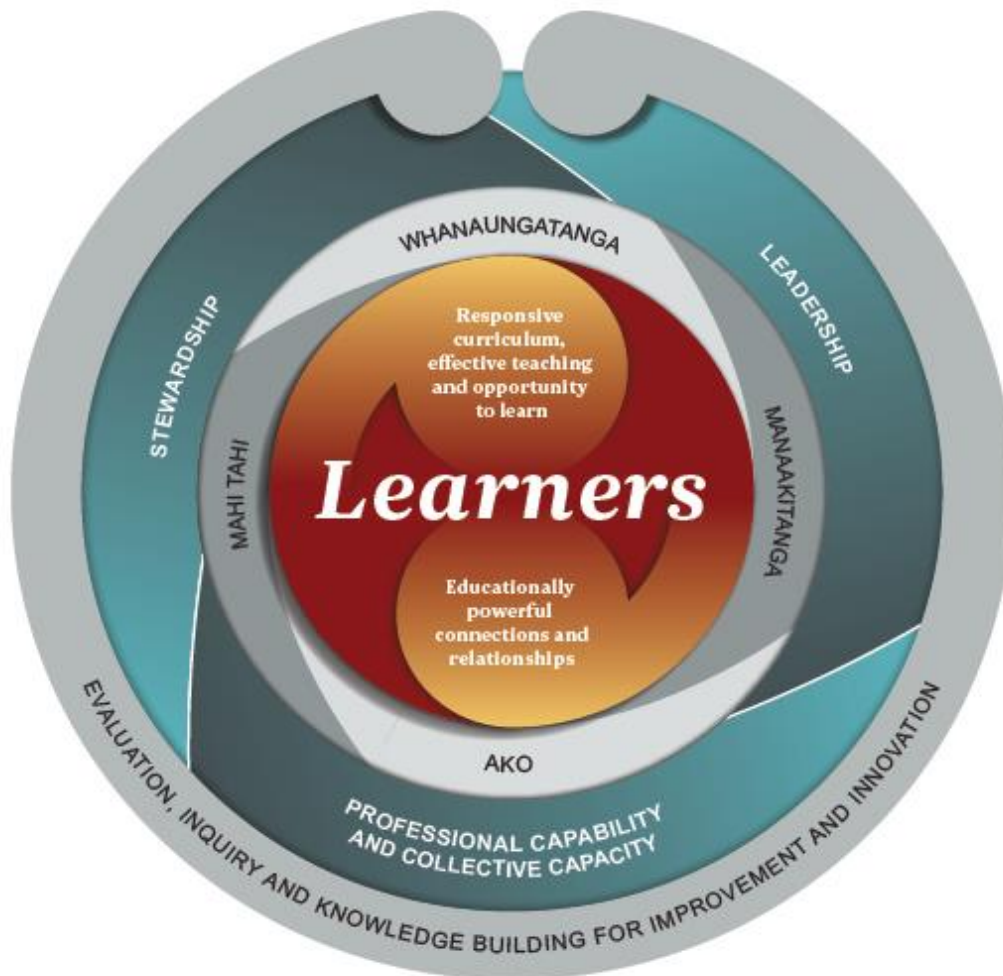


Figure 2 - The evaluation indicators framework

Parent & Community Engagement Framework

This framework has been developed by the Queensland Government. It brings together what is seen as key aspects of the home-school partnership to guide the development and maintenance of strong home-school partnerships, and markers (see table 5) which are used as a checklist of practices that schools can use for assessing the effectiveness of their performance and progress. Table 4 defines the five main elements that make up the framework and form the anchor points from which the various practices are derived.

Table 4 - Parent and Community Engagement Framework.

Parent & Community Engagement Framework	
Communication – Effective communication is an exchange between students, parents, communities, and schools that is inclusive and involves information sharing and opportunities to learn from each other.	
Partnerships with parents – Partnerships between parents, students and schools promote student learning, wellbeing, and high expectations for student success.	
Community collaboration – Relationships between the school and the wider community strengthen the ability of schools and families to support student learning, wellbeing, and developmental outcomes.	
Decision-making – Parents, students and community members play meaningful roles in school decision-making.	
School culture – Respectful relationships between students, parents and the school community are valued and enhance the promotion of student learning and wellbeing.	

(Department of Education – Queensland Government)

Table 5 - Evaluation Marker for Engagement Success.

Evaluation Marker for Engagement Success	
Schools seeking to assess their engagement success should consider whether:	
The school genuinely values two-way communication between parents and school personnel to ensure both parent and school knowledge is used to inform practice	
Parents are part of the conversation about implementing inclusive school practices and provide input into school improvement planning (for example, through a school-based community liaison officer)	
Every parent feels welcomed and valued as part of the school community, is comfortable expressing their views, and has means to contribute their views (for example, interpreters if required)	
Every interaction occurring on the school grounds is respectful	
Parents are encouraged to take a genuine and close interest in the work of the school, are acknowledged as the first teachers of their children, and engage as partners in their children's learning and wellbeing	

Communication with parents provides information about where students are up to in their learning, what progress they have made over time and what they might do to support their children's further learning	
Respectful and caring relationships are reflected in the ways in which staff, students and parents interact and through the language they use in both formal and informal settings	
The school has regular and ongoing ways of finding out what parents need to assist them to engage with their child's learning	
Parents can list the school's key expectations for behaviour, attendance and homework	
The principal and teachers use many styles of communication appropriate for parents' cultural backgrounds, availability, and work arrangements	
The principal and teachers regularly connect with the parent/s of every child in the school	
The principal and teachers connect with a wide range of community members	
There are mechanisms to build relationships with relevant members of the community	

(Department of Education – Queensland Government)

This framework provides limited direct guidance to schools other than for compliance. The main objectives are relatively broad and lacking specific outcomes, while the markers also only provide outcomes that can be interpreted and addressed in many different ways. There is no direction towards specific approaches or practices that could be used to enhance home-school partnerships, nor is there any expectation or encouragement to build structures that support and grow parent and whānau engagement.

2.6 In the New Zealand context

2.6.1 The Treaty of Waitangi

In 1840, 512 Rangatira of the Confederation and William Hobson as the representative for Queen Victoria of England signed a Treaty joining in partnership the indigenous Māori people of New Zealand and the then British Empire. The Treaty outlined three articles that were designed to provide peace, joint power sharing and decision making roles while also setting up structures to develop New Zealand further.

Article one, in the Māori version, spoke of giving the Queen 'kawanatanga' or governance of the country. However, in the English version, it was translated as giving sovereignty

(Brookfield, 2006), (exclusive and indivisible control – not shared). Something Māori held in high regard and would not have agreed to had they been told the whole truth (Consedine, 2005).

Article two of the Treaty guaranteed to Māori the right of ‘tino rangatiratanga’ or self-determination over their own destiny as the indigenous people of New Zealand. This was meant to provide Māori with control and power to protect, their ‘kainga’ (villages) and ‘taonga’ (treasures), which included language and culture (Bishop & Glynn, 1999). The English version provided Māori with the right to maintain ownership only for as long as they wished. Which implied that if they chose to sell their lands, they would forfeit both ownership and control (Brookfield, 2006). This concept was not fully explained and understood by many Māori and resulted in them selling off large amounts of ancestral lands thinking they still maintained ultimate ownership as mana whenua.

Article three stated, in both versions, that the Māori people were to receive the protection of the Queen and hold the status of British subjects (Brookfield, 2006).

Despite those articles being written, Pakeha (people of English descent) suppressed the Māori people, along with their language and culture, by manipulating the law (Consedine, 2005), and implementing policies and educational initiatives that only promoted Pakeha knowledge, language and thinking (Bishop & Glynn, 1999).

Much of the confusion came about because most important Māori concepts cannot be translated into English using just a single word (Metge, 1995). The translation is further complicated due to the nature of many of those concepts deriving from a Māori worldview, into which very few non-Māori can gaze and come away with a clear understanding. Concepts are not only multi-layered but also overlapping, intertwined and sometimes contradicting (Metge, 1995). They need to be lived and experienced for complete understanding, not just explained. So, when the Treaty was written, there was never a clear and equal understanding of what was being agreed upon.

2.6.2 Education in New Zealand

A brief history for Māori

Prior to Pakeha contact, Māori had well-established teaching and learning strategies that were effective and played a big part in their day to day life (Rata, 2009).

After the Treaty was signed in 1840, the state was concerned about 'civilising' Māori, deeming them ignorant (Bishop, 2006) and encouraging them to abandon their traditional cultural values, customs and language in favour of the European ways (Simon, Smith, & International Research Institute for Māori Indigenous Education, 2001). An education system was developed which denied and belittled the existing system and viewed the presence of both Māori language and culture as an impediment to educational progress (Bishop & Glynn, 1999), not understanding it, or respecting it in any way (Bishop, 2006).

These events coincided with the selling and stripping of land, which for many Māori took away their connection to parts of their whakapapa and aspects of their identity (Rata, 2009). Laws were changed at the time and over the following one hundred years that undermined the concept of 'whānau', banning many of the practices that bound families together, replacing them with an 'approved' form of what a family unit constituted (Metge, 1995). The consequence is that the disconnect was not just with their land but also with the structure that allowed them to transfer knowledge in a way that was meaningful to Māori.

By the middle of the 1840s Māori were displeased with the schooling that was being offered to them as it did not meet their needs in providing the English language skills necessary to negotiate with the colonists (Rata, 2009). Colonialists also applied the belief that they knew what was best for Māori and made conforming compulsory (Bishop & Glynn, 1999). Unfortunately, as the education system at the time was run by individual provincial governments, what was being taught varied from area to area (Rata, 2009).

Native Schools were established in 1867. However, there was much confusion regarding the role of these schools and policy changes were needed to address public pressure, including that from many Māori communities (Simon et al., 2001). These schools were only for primary level schooling initially and did not introduce secondary schooling until 1941 (Simon et al., 2001). The idea behind them was that they would merge students with board schools once they were competent with the English language. The last Native schools were reassigned into the state system in 1969.

In 1962 the Currie Report was published, documenting the main education goal was still 'equality of opportunity', in a system they believed was progressing, and the most suitable to continue with. However, while praising the system that was operating at that time, they

also identified several groups whom it was not working for. Central to these were Māori, and children in rural areas (Rata, 2009).

In 1985 the Ministry of Education set up a trial of Kura Kuapapa Māori, total immersion schools for Māori language, as an extension to the existing Kohanga Reo (pre-school Language nurseries). These schools were the only real change in the new education reforms that provided Māori with more choice, say, and control over the education of their children (Smith, 1991).

Boards of Trustees were set up in the 1990s as part of the Tomorrows Schools reform in the hope that they would bring school staff, parents and whānau closer together (Wylie, 1990). These partnerships joined parents and whānau with principles and tasked them to govern schools together (Berryman, Nevin, et al., 2015), but this did little to address schooling issues for Māori (Smith, 1991).

There were however other initiatives also set up to support Māori, which included: Parent support programmes (Āwhina Mātua), Television series to support Māori language and culture development (Tikitiki), alternative schools for teenage parents (He Huarahi Tamariki), and alternative learning centres for youth who struggle to learn in mainstream schooling (Te Puawaitanga) (New Zealand. Ministry of Education & Te Puni Kōkiri, 1997).

However, even with all these initiatives and the emphasis put on schools to embrace and include parents and whānau more, many Māori families did not see any change as schools still dictated how and when engagement occurred, and this was often only to report progress, with very little opportunity for parents and whānau to be involved in the say and development of their child's learning (Berryman, Nevin, et al., 2015).

Today Māori are still signalling their desire to have more say in education, calling for greater accountability, and a change of attitudes and expectations towards and for Māori (Berryman, Nevin, et al., 2015).

Traditional indigenous learning styles.

Māori are complex tribal people, each with their own stories, histories, genealogies and traditions (Bishop & Glynn, 1999), which were often passed from one person or generation to another through the use of whakapapa (genealogy); waiata (poetry and songs); whakatauāki (proverbs); korero tawhito (histories) and whaikōrero (speeches) (Hemara,

2000). These methods were an integral part of their culture, social organisation, and daily life (Rata, 2009).

Traditional Māori learning was governed by a class system, which determined who was eligible to learn specific knowledge based on their social standing and readiness (Benton, 1995). Kaumatua played an essential role as both teachers and guardians of knowledge (Hemara, 2000), and there were three main learning strategies followed, 1. selection by ascription and examination; 2. education through exposure; and 3. apprenticeships or individual tutoring (Benton, 1995).

- Ascription and examination took the form of formal lectures outside the duties of daily life and was usually reserved for only males of the rangatira or ariki class.
- Education through exposure was based on gaining skills and knowledge by watching or listening to others doing tasks and then participating in those same tasks. This type of learning was how most people learnt what was required of them as members of the whānau, hapu, or iwi.
- Apprenticeships involved one on one tutoring where the selected student worked alongside an expert who would pass on knowledge.

The concept of Mahi Tahi comes from these traditional times when working together was vital for the success of the tribe (Berryman, 2014). Education started at home and was supplied by whānau (Brookfield, 2006; Ewing & Shallcrass, 1970), through such activities as construction, food production and child-rearing. As children grew, so too did their skills, which was seen as supporting their spiritual, intellectual and physical wellbeing (Hemara, 2000).

While Māori did participate in the establishment of Native Schools in 1867, they were not in control of these (Simon et al., 2001) and despite guarantees protecting their cultural artefacts, Māori language, cultural aspirations and learning methods were marginalised (Bishop & Glynn, 1999) to support a shift to European education (Ewing & Shallcrass, 1970).

2.6.3 Rural vs urban locations and schools

The standard urban and rural classification was based on population size (Statistics New Zealand, 2006). However, this simplicity overlooks the many differences between urban and

rural areas (Truscott & Truscott, 2005), and neglects to reflect the characteristics that make each place different.

Secondary and minor urban areas are now classified based on their proximity to and dependence upon main urban areas (Statistics New Zealand, 2006). While rural areas are defined by the comparison of the need to travel to urban areas for employment, and the distance required to travel. This suggests that distance from a main urban area is more representative of status rather than the population of that area.

Irrespective of the classifications Truscott and Truscott (2005) believe that urban and rural schools both face similar challenges. Together they have to deal with increasing government expectations around accountability and higher student achievement while also having to operate with a shortage of qualified teachers.

However, there are also apparent differences, and they point out that seldom do we hear about the problems and challenges in rural schools (Truscott & Truscott, 2005). Rural communities often have limited school facilities, high unemployment rates and a lack of local amenities to hold residents and attract certified teacher applicants. They are compounded further by low population density and higher costs for educational services.

On top of this, many schools are now being confronted with increased diversity as more and more families relocate out of urban areas due to the rising cost of living. All these economic conditions make it harder for many families who have struggled financially for years to maintain a positive outlook towards the value of school and work (Truscott & Truscott, 2005).

Contrasting this, there are also many people leaving rural communities to seek greater employment opportunities, leaving behind families who cannot afford the shift, increasing the percentages of low-income families within these small communities.

2.7 Challenges in this review

Results and conclusions drawn in much of the research are not derived from studies comparing similar factors or methods used. Without this consistent view of comparing the same variables, there will always be inaccuracies in the findings (Pomerantz et al., 2007).

Mostly international research

Unfortunately, much of the research into engagement with parents and whānau, and how it is best achieved, comes from international sources and relates predominantly to middle-class families of European descent (Pomerantz et al., 2007). Few studies explore this issue relating to immigrant families or within contexts where there such diversity, such as found in New Zealand.

Local data is generalised

New Zealand research and data, while being more contextualised, still does not look at specific differences across urban, minor urban and rural settings. Nor does it explore and conclude how best to promote and optimise engagement between schools and their parent/whānau community. Understandably each school is a unique environment to which considerations must be made at a local level. However, much research has gone into the need for schools to be culturally responsive and reduce disparity, with directives and guidance on what should be done by everyone, just not how that can or should be achieved.

2.8 Summary

This literature review has explored the main factors that relate to engagement between parents, whānau and schools. It identified various concepts that underpin home-school partnerships and the keys to their success. The different parties were characterised, along with the concept of 'whānau' and significant leadership responsibilities. 'Engagement' was broken down into, various methods and into three distinct types (involvement, empowerment and solidarity), before existing frameworks were critiqued.

Consideration of the New Zealand context and its implication on engagement identified several issues deriving from The Treaty of Waitangi, and the history of Māori education. These provide some explanation of why Māori parents and whānau are often reluctant to engage with schools.

Traditional learning styles of Māori and the difference between urban and rural settings were also explored to fully understand all aspects that can potentially influence engagement.

While no definitive blueprint of how schools should engage with their parent and whānau communities were discovered, there is evidence to suggest what should be focused upon to promote engagement along with the benefits of doing so. School leaders have a crucial role to play in establishing a culture within their schools that provides a welcoming, respectful,

and inclusive environment where all parents and whānau, regardless of ethnicity or background, feel valued and able to contribute. It appears that through the development and nurturing of these partnerships, that engagement also grows. Parents and whānau who start simply being involved build confidence and an understanding of how the school operates. Empowered, they then participate at a higher level and actively seek opportunities to contribute to the growth of the school, continuing until they too have a sense of ownership and belonging.

The knowledge gained through this review has allowed for a greater understanding of the various aspects that contribute to effective engagement. While at times engagement can be complicated, it is, however, built on fundamental relational practices which facilitate the development of a unified working partnership for the purpose of achieving shared goals.

Greater awareness of the issues that Māori have endured and are still facing in and around education has provided crucial context to the increased challenges that schools in small-town and rural areas face with their higher Māori populations. This understanding further highlights the need to strongly consider the use of the Māori concepts reviewed to guide engagement with these communities – approaching Māori as Māori.

CHAPTER THREE – Methodology

Ka mate kāinga tahi, ka ora kāinga rua

There is more than one way to achieve an objective

3.1 Introduction:

This chapter identifies the key research questions that are used to shape and direct the study and then outlines the guiding details that were chosen for the design of the project. The approaches taken, why they were chosen, along with various considerations that influenced the study are then explained, justifying the rationale behind why specific methods were selected, and seen to be more applicable than others. The chapter finishes up by stating the procedures that were followed in terms of both gathering and analysing data, and where necessary discussing any issues that occurred.

For the purpose of this chapter, I take ‘research’ to incorporate the specific blend of approaches, methods of both data types and collection methods, along with the paradigm in which it is viewed. I also take ‘analysis’ to mean those practices such as coding, classifying, and the creation of themes for the structuring of the data, and to allow a clearer picture of the findings to be obtained and understood.

3.2 The Research Questions

Main research question:

What methods are employed by senior leadership teams in small-town and rural schools to engage with their parent and whānau community to get them involved in the life and development of the school and their children's learning?

3.3 Methodology

The design of the study was developed with two primary considerations. That of who the participants would be and the associated constraints that needed to be considered when dealing with them. For senior leaders, time was the most significant constraining factor. Of all the schools that could not be part of this study, lack of time was the single reason they were unable to commit to the study. However, with parent and whānau, it was the terminology used, and whether or not they would understand the underlying concepts being discussed. The constraints for both senior leaders and parents and whānau drove the need to ensure that whatever data was to be collected, it must be done without too much of a time commitment, and in a clear, simple, and straightforward manner. Question numbers for all participants were kept to a minimum, and the structuring of the questions, both in terms of the terminology used and underlying concept, was relative to whom they were being presented. For example, the term and concept of 'solidarity' were put to senior leaders, where it was put to parents and whānau as 'a sense of belonging.'

The following research perspectives and approaches, as well as methods of data collection and analysis, were chosen for this study because of their ability to provide a stable platform for gathering and analysing the rich data needed to address the complexities of the questions raised.

3.3.1 Interpretive paradigm

A research paradigm is a viewpoint taken and used to decode and distil the essence and purpose of the research being undertaken, while also providing insights into data collection approaches and an orientation towards cognitively configuring the data which the research produces (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2017).

This study was conducted within an interpretive paradigm. Borko, Liston, and Whitcomb (2007) propose the following descriptive for this paradigm:

“It seeks to describe, analyse, and interpret features of a specific situation, preserving its complexity and communicating the perspectives of participants.” (pg. 4)

They also espouse that at its core it is essentially a search for the local meaning that relates to the phenomena being studied (Borko et al., 2007), and not necessarily one that is transferable or representative of a wider group beyond the specific group being studied.

The interpretive paradigm view also allows the researcher to balance the need for scientific rigour with the natural richness and authenticity of the human behavioural experience (Cohen et al., 2017).

Additionally, Denzin, Lincoln, and Giardina (2006) refer to the use of this paradigm as conducting research in a manner that has the potential to create positive, ethical and communitarian change.

The limitations of this paradigm, however, are that there are very few existing frameworks to draw upon that can help guide the structuring of a methodology that will allow comparisons to be drawn between studies of the same or similar phenomena (Borko et al., 2007). This is due to the interpretive paradigm often being utilised in one-off case studies (Bassey, 2012), and being seen as the best way to drill down into the localised nature and uniqueness of the phenomena rather than those aspects and characteristics that are comparable (Borko et al., 2007).

3.3.2 Research Approach: Case study

While Cohen et al. (2017) believe that a definition for a case study is elusive, it is often defined as a single and often unique event (Simons, 2009) which is not easily open to replication, and leads to the development of a localised story that encapsulates what is happening within the confines of the context (Cohen et al., 2017), and the relationships being studied.

Multiple site case studies, which this study employed, are where the same phenomena are studied at different locations for the same research project. This allowed for the comparison of localised stories between schools with similar characteristics yet in different geographical areas (Bassey, 2012).

Approaching this research using case studies not only allowed the researcher the flexibility to adopt a broad yet critical view of what is happening, but it also placed them in a position to understand why things were happening that way (Bassey, 2012). This is due to being able to embrace and interpret the many stakeholder perspectives that naturally fall out of the data as a result of approaching it this way (Simons, 2009). It also allowed for the consideration of those perspectives in a way that exposes possible competing explanations of the findings and provides justification for those chosen.

Additionally, the scope of a case study also facilitates the use of mixed methods by combining elements of both qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis to provide greater rigour (Denzin, 2012). This then provides a richer and more meaningful understanding of a phenomenon than a single data type might generate (Cohen et al., 2017).

Qualitative Research Data

Qualitative research gathers or generates data that reflects what people are saying or thinking. It can come in verbal or written forms but is based on the interpretation of what is being stated or said. Analysing the discourse helps to not only look deep into an issue but also to reveal, if possible, feelings, messages, or motivations (Perryman, 2012). This type of data is critical for a study of this nature as it allows participants' thoughts and experiences to be expressed in a natural and authentic way, which is then interpreted for underlying meaning and assumptions afterwards.

Quantitative Research Data

Quantitative research is an empirical exploration to uncover the hard data that can either support or challenge the subjective interpretations espoused by the qualitative findings. In this study, hard data comes in the form of statistical validation of parent and whānau opinions relating to engagement methods.

3.3.3 Data collection methods:

This section briefly describes the data collection methods used in this study. Each one is explained to outline both the benefits and why they were used. How the data was collected using these methods is also discussed. How the data was analysed is covered in section 3.4

Interviews:

“Through conversations, we get to know other people, get to learn about their experiences, feelings and hopes and the world they live in”. (Kvale, 2007, p.2)

The interviews conducted were semi-structured and worked in a way that focused on being ‘fit for purpose’ (Cohen et al., 2017) in the sense that they were designed to obtain comparable data from different interviewees. Talking in an unstructured way regarding the topic could have led anywhere, while too rigid a structure would not have allowed the

interviewees the opportunity and freedom to open up and expand on their answers (Coleman, 2012). Consequently, the semi-structured approach acquired a more comprehensive response for each question and helped develop a richer picture of the phenomena within the context, illuminating the uniqueness of the case while also providing comparable data for interpretation and analysis.

“Every interview, besides being an information-gathering occasion, is an interpersonal drama with a developing plot” (Flick, 2004, p.209)

Interviews were carried out with members of the senior leadership team from three schools to discuss the methods schools were using to engage with parents and whānau, how effective these methods were from their point of view, and the benefits and challenges associated with engaging. The rationale behind interviewing different leaders at each school is that in all schools, the various leaders have differing roles, so what methods might be employed by one leader for various tasks or situations may differ from what another leader may use or do.

Questions for senior leadership members within participating schools:

- Which methods do senior leaders consider effective for building involvement and stronger relationships with parent/whānau? Why? How?
- How beneficial has engaging with parents and whānau been for improving student learning?
- What are the challenges are senior leaders facing when trying to involve parents and whānau?
- How have they addressed these challenges?
- Using the three progressive stages of engagement framework proposed. 1. Involvement, 2. Empowerment, 3. Solidarity - What does each of these stages look like at various schools?
- Where does each school place its parents and whānau engagement?
- What evidence do they use to make this judgment?

Survey

Survey research is one of the most widely used research methods in the field of educational leadership and a very good source of obtaining opinions and attitudes towards a topic (Muijs, 2012). They are a fast, effective way to reach a wide target audience and can produce both qualitative and quantitative data (Cohen et al., 2017).

Surveys were sent out via email to all parents and whānau from each school community. Mindful of the considerations noted earlier, surveys were kept brief, clear, and simple (Muijs, 2012), and they used a language that was considered suitable for the target audience.

The limitations of this type of survey are that they rely on people having access to computers, and like any survey, they lack the interviewer's presence to interpret the meaning of questions should there be any confusion. Another issue with surveys is people's perceptions of the time commitment required to participate. The survey was promoted to only take around 5-10 minutes only.

Questions for parents/whānau of participating schools:

- What motivates parents/whānau to engage with the school?
- What do parents and whānau see as barriers to them engaging with their child's school?
- Are parents and whānau happy with the methods that the senior leadership at their child's school uses to engage them in their child's education? (Engage - not just communicate).
- Do parents and whānau feel that being engaged with the school has or would improve their child's learning? If so, how?
- Do parents and whānau feel that being engaged with the school has or would improve their sense of belonging to the school community? In what way?

Document collection and analysis

Document analysis is the systematic process (Bowen, 2009) of examining documentation that may or may not have relevance to phenomena, interpreting, analysing, and drawing conclusions about data they contain (Briggs, Coleman, & Morrison, 2016; Fitzgerald, 2012).

These documents hold a written history (Foucault, 1970) that speak and preserve what was thought, stated, or decided upon at the time of compilation, regarding the subject matter recorded.

The purpose for this type of analysis within the study was to gauge the intentions of the institutes towards the phenomena (engaging with parents and whānau), a means of triangulating the data, and to provide background information on participating schools to help understand and confirm the context each is situated within.

While this is a relatively easy form of evidence to gather, especially now much is digital, it does require critical questions to be asked during its evaluation. The document gathered for this study came from school or government websites, and the school leaders themselves.

3.3.4 Triangulation

Denzin (2012), describes triangulation as the use of multiple research methods to obtain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon being studied. By utilising and combining the three methods chosen, interviews, surveys, and document analysis, not only does it allow for the generation of a deeper and richer understanding of phenomena, but it also facilitates the cross-validation of what has been said (Oliver-Hoyo & Allen, 2006). However, Denzin (2010) cautions, simply combining methods does not lead to a more comprehensive picture nor the truth.

Figure 3 illustrates the goal of the different research methods chosen to merge the data on the research phenomena in a way that not only fits together but also increases the credibility of the interpretations presented (Bowen, 2009).



Figure 3 - Combining research methods to triangulate data.

My focus on triangulation in this study was to see if through the three data collection methods chosen, was what the school espoused in their strategic plan, in terms of engaging with parents and whānau to improve relationships, home/school connections, and improve student outcomes, being implemented and practised in a meaningful and effective manner. Also, how this was being carried out, and whether or not these methods were effective from the perspective of the target group, the parents and whānau.

3.3.5 Procedures and participants

What follows is a breakdown of the field research practices and the considerations taken at various stages.

Profiling schools to match study requirements.

One of the keys to successfully addressing the research questions was to ensure that all the schools involved were located in an area that matched, as closely as possible, a defined set of characteristics that typify a ‘small town’ or ‘rural’ area in New Zealand. This would ensure that there was a consistent definition being applied when selecting schools to approach.

Utilising the urban/rural profile set out by the Department of Statistics (Statistics New Zealand, 2006), who are responsible for zoning in New Zealand. Their definition of 'small town' and 'rural' (appendix I) illustrates what some of the considerations are when trying to define the status of an area.

Utilising the Ministry of Education's 'New Zealand Schools Directory' (Ministry of Education, 2019) it was then possible to search for schools by filtering various categories to better align possible selections with the definition I was working with, while also providing some basic background information (school type, authority, roll, ethnicity). This directory also had different pre-set 'urban areas' which mirrored closely those defined by the Department of Statistics (the schools that fell within certain 'urban areas' in the directory were located in zones that closely matched the same characteristics (population, location in relation to cities, employment) identified by the Department of Statistics).

The result was a list of schools in three different regions across the central and lower North Island of New Zealand, with each region categorised into 'minor urban/rural,' and 'secondary urban' areas, and then further broken down into schools more geographically accessible to the researcher.

Obtaining participants

Once a list of suitable schools was developed, and approval was given by the university ethics committee, invitations to be involved with the study (appendix A) were sent out to the Principals of the first group of schools. It was requested of Principals that they discuss the research project with their Board of Trustees to gain their approval and support.

Once schools were obtained, further information was emailed to the Principal to share with their leadership team. This included information about the research project (appendix C), as well as the interview information and questions for the senior leaders prior to interviews (appendix D & E). This initial information also provided ethical statements outlining individuals' rights, which also helped to establish a certain level of professionalism and trust (Stutchbury & Fox, 2009).

Brief description of participating schools

All of the participating schools identified as state-run secondary schools located within minor urban/rural areas in the central and lower north island of New Zealand. Student rolls varied between 340 and 470, with the percentage of Maori students being between 47 and

87. The current tenure of the principals in their current role ranged between 7 years to only nine months. The Senior leadership teams were made up of experienced practitioners with many years in teaching and living in the communities they now serve.

Procedures followed throughout the study

School visits to conduct interviews

After consent forms were completed, interview sessions with senior leaders were recorded using the pre-set questions previously shared. The sessions ran between 30 and 65 minutes.

Surveys with parents and whānau

Once the interviews with senior leaders were complete, the methods they use to engage with parents and whānau were added to the survey for that school. The survey questions (appendix G), along with the information on the survey (appendix F), were then linked into the introduction letter for parents and whānau (appendix B). These were then forwarded to the Principal of each school, firstly for them to read and approve, then distribute it to their parent and whānau community in the method they believed most effective.

3.3.6 Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations were made at every stage of the study (Cohen et al., 2017) to ensure participants rights were respected and the integrity of the study maintained (Stutchbury & Fox, 2009).

Approval was obtained from the ethics committee at the University of Waikato prior to the commencement of the study. This not only added to the credibility of the study, but it also ensured that all foreseeable ethical considerations had been checked off (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004).

Participation in the study was voluntary (Cohen et al., 2017), with informed consent being obtained from all participants prior to data collection. Interviewees were all given the opportunity to review a summary of their transcripts to ensure accuracy and provide them with an opportunity to alter or remove anything they should wish.

One particular ethical consideration that was faced was that of being an outside researcher coming into a particular school and community and having to communicate findings that might have been seen as unpopular or offensive to some (Stutchbury & Fox, 2009). This

again highlighted the need for clarity and transparency to all, around the purpose of the research, and the processes being used. This approach further aided the development of a high level of trust with all participants.

Obtaining consent

This is seen as the most central of all ethical principles (Howe & Moses, 1999). It is essential to ensure that all data collection is carried out with participants full understanding of what they were being asked to do and what rights they have.

A signed informed consent form (appendix H) was obtained from each of those involved in an interview before their session. Those parents and whānau who chose to complete and submit a survey were advised in the 'Survey Information Sheet for Parents and Whānau' (appendix F) of their rights and that by submitting the survey, they were consenting to their data being used for the proposed purpose only.

Rights, confidentiality, and anonymity

To obtain the rich data needed for this research project, it was important that a positive experience was created for all the participants with no undue stress (Burton & Bartlett, 2009). One of the ways chosen to achieve this was by reassuring all participants that every step had been taken, without providing a full guarantee (Howe & Moses, 1999), that their identity and what they said was protected at all times.

All participants were informed in the 'Research Information Sheet' (appendix C), and again in the 'Participant Consent Form' (appendix H), that their anonymity and that of the school(s) would be protected by using codes to identify them. This way, no one other than the researcher would know where any of the information had come from.

In the same documents, participants were also advised that all the data gathered will remain confidential both during and after the study was completed (Howe & Moses, 1999). Additionally, all recorded interviews, written notes, quotes, and other documentation was being stored securely on the researcher's password-protected laptop in secure files. Accessible to only the researcher and their supervisors at the university and that at the end of the project, the raw data was going to be archived for five years in accordance with the University of Waikato guidelines, and then destroyed.

Participants were advised of their ability to withdraw themselves or their data from the study should they wish to. This was again conveyed in the Research Information Sheet, Participant Consent Form, and both the Interview and Survey Information Sheets (appendix D & F respectively). This information stated their ability to withdraw at any time up until the start of data analysis after the last interviews had been conducted at their school. The process for withdrawal was to simply email the request to the researcher. That way, both parties also have a written copy of the request, and all data relating to that person will be removed from the relevant data set.

Participants who wished to withdraw and had already submitted surveys (where names were not collected) were required to provide a copy of their survey answers so that the correct data was removed (Each survey participant was given the opportunity to email a copy of their responses to themselves).

3.3.7 Reflectivity

Reflectivity is a critical process (Berger, 2015; Mortari, 2015), in which the researcher reflects upon how knowledge is being constructed (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004), what problems were being encountered, and how these were or were not resolved (Check, 2012).

To ensure the values, beliefs, knowledge, and biases' (Berger, 2015) of the researcher were not tainting or channelling the emergence of knowledge, all interview recordings were scrutinised. This was done to assess the performance of the interviewer, rather than analyse the content.

3.4 Analysis

"It is through analysis and interpretation of how people think, feel and act that many of the insights and understanding of the case are gained". (Simons, 2009, p.4)

3.4.1 Approach to analysis

While Cohen et al. (2017) believe that there is no one single way to analyse and present qualitative data, this study used a thematic approach to traverse these critical tasks. It provides a systematic element for the interpretation of data (Alhojailan, 2012), which

focuses on identifying themes and patterns within people's experiences and behaviour (Aronson, 1995).

Amid this data that is rich with many possible interpretations, the challenge of constructing a 'reality' (Check, 2012) requires the exploration of themes on both semantic (surface) and latent (underlying) levels to gain a clearer understanding of the ideas and assumptions that the data hold (Kvale, 2007; Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). This precipitates the need for repetitious interactions with the data as it is explained and interpreted in a refining of understanding (Check, 2012).

3.4.2 Interview analysis

After transcribing the conversations into text to graphically represent what was said (Flick, Kardorff, & Steinke, 2004), they were summarised and sent to participants for verification before analysis.

The analysis followed a process of looking at the answers to each interview question and coding those answers in relation to how and where they fit alongside the research questions. Themes were then developed, with further sub-themes coming through after repeated examination of the data. Listening to the recordings several times during the interpretation phase facilitated a greater understanding of the text as the tones and emotions of the conversation provided extra meaning.

Data from all the interview participants across the three schools were then combined to provide a comparison and to identify any similarities or contradictions in the data. The results of this generated clear patterns and allowed the themes to harden.

3.4.3 Survey analysis

A similar process was followed in the analysis of the survey data. Codes were attributed to comments that were then aligned to research questions. Themes towards these questions were then developed, with sub-themes ensuing.

Unlike the interview data that gather from surveys was flat and lacked all tone and emotion. This made it more problematic in developing a latent understanding of what was driving parents and whānau in their comments. That said, a clearer picture did develop when several of the questions were viewed in unison.

3.4.4 Document analysis

The documentation reviewed, and data selected for this study looked to gauge the intent on the part of the school to engage with parents and whānau and to understand how they planned to go about doing this. The outcomes would then be compared to those gained in the interviews and surveys.

It was decided to utilise only the strategic plan and charter of each school, along with their latest Education Review Office report. While some schools did have policies and procedures broken down, which included various connections to informing or seeking input from parents and whānau, these were not available from all schools, and it was judged that the same fundamental information was already represented in the documents that were studied.

All documents were read several times, looking first for instances where 'parents' or 'whānau' were mentioned, then in refining those, for expressions of 'involving,' 'engaging,' or 'connecting' with parents and whānau. Further reading was again conducted to ensure terms such as 'community' were not woven into the documents with hidden implications towards engagement.

All instances were then allocated towards the research questions focused on 'emphasis on engagement' and 'plans for engagement' before themes and sub-themes were developed.

3.5 Summary

This chapter outlined the research questions that have guided this study and the methodology which explains and justifies the approaches and methods employed. Multiple case studies were carried out, gathering data through the use of interviews, surveys, and document analysis. These methods provided the opportunity to gain different perspectives of the phenomena for more holistic conclusions to be drawn.

Participants and how they were obtained was briefly described, along with a full breakdown of the procedures that were followed during both the data gathering and analysis stages. The ethical considerations that underpinned the study and provided a framework for good practice and participant safety were also communicated.

CHAPTER FOUR – Research Findings

Ehara taku toa I te toa takitahi engari he toa takimano

My strength is not that of an individual but that of the collective.

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the results of the data analyses. It begins with the views of senior school leaders to gain clarity and understanding of what was currently happening within their schools, why they are taking the approaches they are, and how effective they believe these to be. They were also asked to provide their opinion on three different types of engagement (involvement, empowerment, and solidarity), and where they placed their parent and whānau community using these as stages of engagement.

The main themes that emerged from the analysis are that engagement was seen as necessary by all stakeholders; the methods used to engage with parents and whānau were viewed as most effective by all the senior leaders, as well as parents and whānau; engagement improved the quality of home-school partnerships and a sense of belonging for parents and whānau with their child's school; engagement provides improved opportunities for parents and whānau to contribute to the growth and development of both their child's education and the school.

The various quotes that support the identified themes represent the feelings of participants about the specific interview and survey questions asked, and in relation to their context. Some comments were consistent regardless of the school, while others differed slightly. In these cases, an effort has been made to contextualise the comment, mindful that while all participating schools were similar in regard to their type of environment and composition, they were at different stages of growth or re-building, with leadership teams which were also at different stages of establishment.

Furthermore, as mentioned in the last chapter, schools and participants have all been provided with codes to ensure anonymity.

4.2 Interview insights from senior leaders

The themes and quotes that follow derive from the five interviews conducted with senior leaders at the three participating schools. They represent the views and voices of professional educators who have been working in the education sector for many years.

4.2.1 An emphasis on engaging with parents and whānau.

All school leaders stated that engaging with parents and whānau was of great importance to them and that this responsibility fell to different leaders depending on what role they have in the school. Those in charge of discipline might engage with parents and whānau for restorative purposes, while those in charge of curriculum development may seek input on proposed changes. This type of engagement was seen as being prescribed by the school for an intended outcome. Non-scripted spontaneous engagement also occurred and could be initiated when parents or whānau ‘stopped in’, or when senior leaders attended events, in and out of school, making them more accessible to parents and whānau.

The following table summarises the main themes identified as a result of comments from senior leaders about deliberate acts on the part of the school to either elicit some form of response or as a conscious effort to build relationships.

Table 6 - Emphasis on engagement.

Research Question	Main Themes	Sub Themes
<i>How much emphasis do you place on engaging with the parent and whānau community compared to your other responsibilities?</i>	Engagement is characterised by deliberate acts on the part of the school to either elicit some form of response or as a conscious effort to build relationships.	Engagement is prescribed within the role that each leader holds.
		Non-scripted engagement that is often spontaneous is generally positive in nature, with a corresponding effect on building home/school partnerships.

It was clear that all seven school leaders understood their role in the community and the responsibility they had towards ensuring all stakeholders are informed, valued and able to access them when required.

“We are here for parents and communities” ... “and if you think you are above the clients you serve; you are going to have problems on your hands”.
(School-B, Participant-1)

While engagement was seen as essential in growing home-school partnerships, it was also seen as one of the precursors to the successful growth of students. It is through these partnerships that the job of building young people can be shared, mixing the familiar with the new, and providing support when challenges are faced.

“to enable us to be able to move forward with young people in terms of their learning progress, or in terms of the interactions with them in our school that connection is very important.” (SA, P3)

Leaders felt it was critical that meeting the needs of parents and whānau was one of the main priorities for the school. Providing them with an understanding that what they have to contribute was valued, and if they need support that the school was there to do that.

“it’s a priority that they come first”. “If they need to engage with us, you drop the other bits and pieces you are doing”. (SB, P1)

4.2.2 When does engagement with parents and whānau occur?

The view that came through was that engagement can be formal or informal. Formal in the sense that it relates to specific events or activities typically in the school calendar, with these usually coming with an intended outcome. Informal engagement often occurs at events or during activities such as sporting fixtures where there is no specific intention to engage with parents and whānau, and there are no expectations on either of the parties to engage with each other. All leaders agreed that most of the engagement they have could be characterised as of a positive nature (see Table 7). They also believed that even in those instances where they are engaging parents and whānau to address discipline issues, if they approach them in a positive manner, good outcomes can be achieved by and for everyone.

Table 7 - When does engagement occur?

Research Question	Main Themes	Sub Themes
<i>When does engagement with parents and whānau occur?</i>	Formal occasions which are specifically set up and run by the school.	Discipline (negative)
		Social events (positive)
		Academic/administrative events (positive)
		Pastoral care (positive)
		Planning and development (positive)
	Informal occasions where there is no pre-set plan or objective.	Social/sporting events (positive)

It was clear that all leaders saw engagement as multifaceted, in that it can occur at different times in many different ways.

Leaders commented that communicating, which is an essential part of engagement, can be achieved in a range of ways other than using words alone.

"Communication doesn't have to be oral – the way, and what is being presented by the school/at the school, the way things are done, what is valued, all communicate messages." (SB, P1)

"That is why you need to be mindful all the time, in that if you are talking about communicating, it is how do you show that expression of what you value, and what you do?" (SB, P1)

Leaders further remarked that they needed to be constantly mindful of illustrating and showcasing what is valued and what is held 'important' by the school, and how this engages people and allows them to make connections to their values and beliefs.

4.2.3 Methods used to engage with parents and whānau

Many of the methods used to engage with parents and whānau that the senior leaders described were based around the need to communicate and exchange information back and forth. This type of two-way communication was viewed as connecting people to the school and providing knowledge which can then be applied in the relevant situations (e.g. attend meetings, discuss subject choices with child).

“All my roles closely linked to working/communication with parent/whānau community.” (SA, P1)

“Focus on keeping parents informed from the word go – no surprises.”

“Keep them informed and onboard.” (SA, P1)

The real opportunities for engagement at a higher level, where parents and whānau are empowered to participate in the growth and development of the school, are dependent on a school having systems in place to facilitate such engagement and an openness to sharing power. Open-door policies and steering groups provided opportunities for face to face interactions to occur in two of the schools, according to the leaders there. Surveys were mentioned as a method used by all senior leaders to gain parent and whānau voice on changes within the school, however, there was only one direct reference to engaging people for decision-making activities, other than the Government prescribed Board of Trustees roles. This was in a Māori immersion unit which was successfully being driven through the joint efforts of parents, whānau and the school.

School run events were also seen as a way to draw parents and whānau in, which then provided opportunities for engagement on different matters.

Table 8 - Methods of engagement.

Research Question	Main Themes	Sub Themes
<i>What methods do you use to engage with the parents and whānau?</i>	Engagement is predominantly based around communication and the exchange of information.	Methods that have the sole purpose of providing information to parents and whānau.
		Methods that are employed to involve parents and whānau in the education of their child and the life of the school.
	Level of engagement at each school correlates to the systems each has in place, or offers, to facilitate various interactions to occur. (e.g. open-door policy, steering groups with parent and whānau participants)	Methods that work in a way that empowers parents and whānau to participate in the education of their child and the life of the school.

Engagement on specific issues, such as student progress, was seen as a struggle which required creative solutions by all leaders. Utilising events that brought parents and whānau into a school was seen as an opportunity to connect with them and discuss such issues.

“If we can get them through the gates for events that are not necessarily talking about their student and their work, because that is often something that they are unsure of, don’t like that idea of coming to talk, always worried it’s going to be a negative, but coming into performances and shows, and you can often have that conversation.” (SB, P2)

Schools in most if not all communities in New Zealand have connections to local Iwi. They may also have parents, whānau and students that belong to those iwis in their schools. This is undoubtedly the case in most small town or rural schools and was the situation in all of the schools that participated in this study.

“Part of communicating to our community is that every major event here always follows local Tikanga, and that’s a given, and we don’t muck around with that.” (SB, P1)

It was therefore seen as important by all the leaders to acknowledge that connection by recognising, respecting, and where possible following the local Tikanga (ways of doing things from a Māori perspective) to guide the school, especially on important cultural events.

4.2.4 The effectiveness of the methods employed.

All the senior leaders felt that the methods they were using were effective for the parents and whānau in their community. It was acknowledged that there were no 'one-way suits all' approach, and it was up to them as leaders, to continually seek meaningful ways to connect and engage with all their parents and whānau. Their comments showed that reviewing their school engagement methods are essential, as are having a variety of methods which could be applied in different situations.

Table 9 - Effectiveness of methods employed.

Research Question	Main Themes	Sub Themes
<i>How effective do you feel these methods are?</i>	Overall positive about methods used and response to them.	Noticeable changes when parents and whānau are engaged.
	No 'one size fits all'	Varied responses to methods reflective of the relationship some parents and whānau have with the school.

Acknowledging that what they are doing was working well, leaders also accepted that there are still groups of people that they are not engaging.

"in any school you will get the same parents turning up all the time and you will get that same group of parents you really want to engage and you will continually struggle with them, and I do not think that changes if you are in a big school or a small school." (SB, P1)

While schools come up with a range of methods to encourage engagement, it was still vital that they know and understand the needs of their parents and whānau to be able to package things in a way that works for them.

"Definitely not a one size fits all approach that works for everyone" (SA, P1)

"It is never ever going to be one package fits all" (SB, P2)

Engagement was seen as an ever-evolving, continually changing occurrence.

" We are at that point of, how do we do that better?" ... "how do you re-excite everybody about your communications and connections?" (SB, P2)

Leaders felt that they were not getting the same responses from the methods they have successfully used previously. This brought them to question what they are doing and how they could improve it.

4.2.5 The benefits of engagement.

Improved experiences and outcomes for all stakeholders was seen as the main benefits that stem from home-school engagement. For parents and whānau this comes in the form of opportunities to gain a greater understanding about their child's education; actively contribute to the school, and being empowered to guide and support their child with their learning. For students, they have a more unified support network to draw upon; greater appreciation for the value of their education; improved achievement outcomes; and a better outlook towards their future. Schools gain the benefits of developing stronger working partnerships to share and support their efforts with children and open up access to a broader range of resources from within the community.

Table 10 - Benefits of engagement.

Research Question	Main Themes	Sub Themes
<i>What do you see as the benefits of engaging with parents and whānau?</i>	All engagement improves some aspect of the educational experience for either students, parents and whānau or the school.	Provides opportunities for parents and whānau to contribute to the school.
		Improved student success and outlook for the future
		Everyone on the same page and understand the direction they are going in together
	Builds partnerships between home and school, parents and whānau with their child, students with the school.	Provides a system to support a child.
		Empowers parents and whānau with the knowledge to actively guide and support a child's education.

All the leaders spoke of student centredness permeating everything they do, which included the purpose of engagement with parents and whānau. These partnerships are driven by the desire to provide students with the best support possible to produce the best outcomes possible.

“The long term benefits are what I describe as a wraparound system that the students know that they are at the centre of everybody's care and attention”.

SA P1

Engagement opportunities provide greater clarity for parents and whānau around what happens at school and how they could fit into that picture to support their child's learning and contribute to the school.

“They understand what we are doing, and they are able to contribute and help us move forward or makes things become a reality”. SA P3

4.2.6 The challenges to engagement.

The main challenges that all the schools are facing revolve around the personal situations and personal attitudes of parents and whānau. In many cases, there was a lack of resources which dictates the priorities and behaviour of parents and whānau, and also a lack of willingness to engage.

All the challenges faced have clear ownership and choices for positive or negative outcomes. It was just whether or not the right people are willing to make the right choices.

Table 11 - Challenges to engagement.

Research Question	Main Themes	Sub Themes
<i>What challenges do you face when trying to engage with parents and whānau?</i>	All challenges have clear ownership.	Challenges that relate to the school which may or may not be in their control to change.
		Challenges that relate to the personal circumstances parents and whānau are in, or their attitudes towards education, and that of their child.
	Most challenges have the potential to be overcome.	Challenges that relate to parents and whānau lack of something, or ability to provide something.

The most common challenges to engagement for senior leaders revolved around a lack of finance. In one regard, this is evident through a lack of resources. Parents and whānau do not have the means to connect or engage with the school, be it a lack of computers or insufficient data credit. In another regard, the lack of finance means that parents and whānau are not able to engage on a physical level with the school because of their need to work and earn money.

"There was a time when you had a population where you had more people at home during the day that you could engage, but now everyone is so busy, they just drop and collect, so you do not get to make those connections, so we do need to get smarter about how we do that." SB P2

Lacking finance also has an impact on the number of parents and whānau participating in camps and other school activities. It was once a given that schools could count on their support with these, now few families can afford too.

Understanding the dynamics of families was seen as indispensable when overcoming some of the challenges faced. By having a good knowledge of each family situation, it is possible to navigate issues and engage in ways that work for each family.

"Unless you know your community, and you know your kids, and you know your whānau, you are going to be pushing it uphill with a sharp stick". SB P1

Concerning doing home visits as a method of engaging, especially with 'hard to contact' families, there are new considerations that now challenge this as a form of engagement. Lifestyle choices which involve drugs make the practicality of visiting people in their homes problematic and potentially dangerous.

"Now I would be really reluctant for a lot of our staff, unless I was going, to actually go and do home visits because meth has really altered the face of what some of those conversations look like, and can turn into." SB P1

History plays a big part in people's perceptions of what the school is and represents. Speaking about the changes they have made within their school, leaders at one school pointed out that they are still having to address the effects of the past, breaking down barriers, and building trust, so they can start to engage with parents and whānau again.

"The top was very 'white', and for that, it was so hard for the community to engage, and we have always had a negative ... people had a negative connotation of us at our school." SA P3

"Some of the issues are generational, where parents do not value education because of their experiences at school, and their own limited education. You are not able to support something you do not understand." SC P1

"One of the battles I am facing is the stereotype that because the kids are Māori, they should be fluent in Te Reo, customs, procedures and basic values – no they are not, and you do not have to look any further than our whānau, and the struggles they have been through, and it is a generational thing." SC P1

An additional challenge schools face is that sometimes things happen in the wider community, such as increased house prices or social behaviour, which impact on a school. In this instance, one school who had a long and secure connection with several families lost them all due to the effects of urbanisation and rising house prices.

"I had five families, I lost twenty five kids, in one foul swoop five families just could not afford rent here". SB P1

While schools are faced with this reality all the time, they are powerless to support people in these types of situation. This case was made worst because it meant those families could not afford to live in their tribal area anymore. Not only were they losing a connection with the place their families had been educated at for several generations, but they were also losing their connection to their whenua.

4.2.7 Laying the foundation for engagement.

The following comments did not relate directly to a specific question that was asked but derive from the more in-depth discussions that came out of the questions. The comments illustrate that successful engagement does not just develop based on the interactions that take place but also includes creating an environment where people feel welcome and safe, where their views are valued, and they have a sense of belonging. Additionally, it also involves leadership adopting an approach which places an importance on demonstrating their commitment to the community and doing things in a way that respects the community.

When talking about getting people to attend events run by the school, one leader spoke of role modelling to the community the school's commitment to them, and what supporting each other looks like.

"if they put something on, we are going to go". SA P2

Engaging the community on aspects of Tikanga or best practice around important issues shows that the school not only wants to do things properly, but they also want to share ownership of those important things with the community. Through this approach, connections are made with families as they see that their culture is reflected in the schools.

"When you talk about communication, I guess there is that whole two-way thing, that there is also the need to go out and say, this is important to us, who have you got that is going to inform us around our good practice?" SB P1

It was important for schools to be non-judgemental. Holding this mindset, along with that of valuing people and their views are critical. This approach provided parents and whānau with a safe environment to engage in and nurtures future encounters.

"When families come into school, their views are valued, and they are not going to be judged ... which is a huge change from what it used to be". SA P3

Being open and accessible to parents, whānau, and the wider community is essential to ensuring that the school gains a clear understanding of what is relevant to these groups, and allows the school to be more congruent and form closer connections.

"People that are key to the way and things that go on in your college, you have to give them every opportunity to get in there and talk to you, or you go there and talk to them, either way, your school has to be reflective of the things that are valued by your community." SB P1

Utilising every resource available, and being creative with knowledge was seen as indispensable. Often, especially when trying to engage with families that are 'hard to work with', it was deemed necessary to 'tap' into these resources to find solutions that work.

“We do have a number of staff who have worked in this community for a long time, and have lived in this community for a long time, so there is a lot of institutional knowledge about families, and members of families, and who to contact, and who to get to make those connections” SB P1

One leader spoke of the message they were presenting in a whānau hui. Their approach was to place the school firmly as being ‘part of the community’ and make the connection that building one is building both.

“History is history, our tikanga is our tikanga, let’s not compromise any of it but work in partnership.” SC P1

Creating symbols or presenting local history which parents, whānau and the wider community can see and identify with, presents the school as a place that holds similar values to their own. This connection could then facilitate a greater openness, on the part of parents and whānau, to engage with the school.

“Communication just doesn’t have to be oral” ... “it’s through these expressions of giving things importance, and elevating the mana of where they come from, is just as important messaging.” SB P1

“It’s about the school becoming some kind of historical place where kids can go and learn and understand about critical people and/or events, that we can actually give them a sense of understanding of who they are.” SB P1

4.2.8 The three stages of engagement – measuring where parents and whānau are placed.

The appraisal of where a school is placed regarding 'involvement', 'empowered', and 'solidarity', was correlated by leaders as being how much participation each school had from parents and whānau in certain activities or events. Turning up to planned events was seen as involvement, whereas responding to school surveys was deemed as a representation of parents and whānau being empowered and contributing to the growth of the school. Solidarity was seen by all leaders as the level of ownership parents and whānau took towards their child’s education, and in supporting the school.

Using this simplified view, the leaders of each school placed themselves in terms of where they felt their parents and whānau community were situated. Some leaders within one school placed the parents and whānau differently from their colleagues. This response was, however, due to one leader not having been at that particular school for long. They based their decision on what they were seeing now, whereas their colleagues both based their decision on how far they felt the parents and whānau have come over some time.

Table 12 - Three stages of engagement.

Research Question	Main Themes	Sub Themes
<i>Thinking of engagement in three progressive stages: Involvement – Empowered – Solidarity, where would you place the parents and whānau in your school?</i>	Judgement appears based on the number of parents and whānau attending parent teacher conferences (involvement) or responding to surveys (empowered).	Involvement is seen as ‘turning up, but not contributing’
		Empowerment associated with the extent to which parent and whānau have, and use ‘voice’
	Parents and whānau are at different stages within each school, for different reasons.	Solidarity occurs when parents and whānau take ‘ownership’ of what schools are doing.

The development of the school was seen as a journey of continuous growth and development. One leader shared their hope and belief that all the work and engagement that was occurring in their school was taking parents and whānau on a journey of growth and development — one where Kotahitanga is achieved.

"In terms of solidarity, I would like to think what we are doing will work towards ownership and ultimately pride in what we have done and how we have succeeded." SC P1

4.3 Surveying parents and whānau

The findings and direct comments that follow are drawn from the parent and whānau surveys delivered across the three participating schools. The results stem from only two of those schools, as no responses were submitted from school C. This could be a reflection of the

level of engagement or communication between home and school, or it could have been the result of some technical issue that the researcher is unaware of (To respect each school and their methods of engagement the survey was to be distributed by them, rather than the researcher doing so). Regardless of the lack of data that was obtained, what was collected from parent and whānau was comprehensive enough for clear patterns to be seen and conclusions to be drawn.

While the response rate to this survey was not as high as hoped, the data obtained still held sufficient voice for both positive and negative correlation to be drawn with what senior leaders had stated.

4.3.1 Reasons why they do engage with the school

The most consistent reason given for engaging with the school and its leaders was to ensure the best interests of their child were being looked after. Most of this revolved around parents and whānau wanting to understand what their child is doing at school so they could support these efforts at home. Other reasons were to ensure that health or behaviour issues their child might have were being looked after and supported at school.

A further motivating factor for parents and whānau was to become engaged and contribute to the life and development of the school. They saw this as a way to link themselves to their child's education while also giving to the community.

Table 13 - Motivation to engage.

Research Question	Main Themes	Sub Themes
<i>What motivates you to engage with the school?</i>	Best interests of a child.	Health and wellbeing of a child.
		Academic development of a child.
	Contribute to the life and development of the school.	Part of being 'community'
		Linked to development of their child.

The growth and wellbeing of children underpin most decisions to engage with the school. Many parents and whānau seem to see being engaged in the education of their child as an extension of their caregiver role.

“My moko has special needs so I engage with the school so I know who is involved in my moko's day, what role they play in her education and if she is happy in the process.” (School-B, Parent/Whānau 30)

“A desire to help improve things and to support the school in providing the best educational opportunities for my child.” (SB, P/W 22)

“Shows my student that I have an interest in their learning.” (SA, P/W 4)

“Without my involvement, the children would not see the learning as important.” (SB, P/W 15)

“If we are not engaged with the school, our children may think we don't care, and they may not focus on trying to achieve their best.” (SB, P/W 18)

This attitude is also carried over into the work they do to help build a better school – to provide for their child.

“Helping with community wellbeing” (SB, P/W 10)

“Better educational outcomes for my children and other students in the school. Increased involvement and engagement by the wider parent community.” (SB, P/W 3)

“I am part of a community that cares and contributes to our educational providers.” (SB, P/W 33)

4.3.2 Reasons why they do not engage with the school

The main barriers to engagement were clearly split between those that were a consequence of personal circumstances and those that could be seen as related to relationships between home and school.

A lack of time was the most consistent reason given for not engaging. Due to the need to work and manage other family commitments people voiced that they physically are not in a position to engage in the way they would like. Location to the school was also a reason for not engaging. In these small-town/rural community's families often live many kilometres from the school, and for financial reasons, travel is prioritised.

Further barriers to engagement derived from parents and whānau not feeling comfortable in the school environment. For some, this was a case of a bad experience in the past, or they did not feel the current leadership valued their voice - especially when they were not consulted on significant school changes. Others felt unable to connect with the leaders of the school due to the language used, which made them feel intimidated and reluctant to contribute.

Table 14 - Barriers to engagement.

Research Question	Main Themes	Sub Themes
<i>What do you see as the barriers to you engaging with your child's school?</i>	Personal circumstances.	Time constraints
		Location
	Relationship with the school.	Uncomfortable or intimidated.
		No Voice
		Incongruent values

Here it was clear that the issue of busy lives and not having time mirror one of the challenges that senior leaders identified. Parents and whānau are staying in touch through time-efficient and convenient methods only. They have to forego engagement at a deeper, more personal level, forced to be selective based on their circumstances.

"At a physical level, it is about time. A lot of my engagement is through email and when necessary, via phone." (SB, P/W 36)

"Not sure, maybe time restraints or transport issues, laziness, or "I can't be bothered", mentality, lack of support, communication skills, feeling whakama if you can't afford to pay for something etc...not knowing how to engage." (SB, P/W 27)

It is evident from the examples below, that while schools may feel they are doing something well, often the perception from other parties is quite different. Schools need to gain the voice from parents and whānau and be open to criticism.

"They are not approachable. Notice/sign may say open-door policy; however, the vibe/atmosphere is totally different." (SB, P/W 3)

“I would willingly give my time, and have in the past to the school, but there is not an inclusive feeling at the college for parents.” (SB, P/W 10)

Communicating with parents and whānau on important matters, and in a language that respects who they are, is essential in education. This acknowledges diversity, promotes an inclusive environment, and ensures that everyone is on the same page and able to contribute.

“I’m not a professional educator and educators can really talk some nonsensical jargon when they choose to.” (SB, P/W 37)

“They don’t let me know what’s happening. It is very hard to put ideas or pros and cons for ideas if you don’t know the story of what’s happening, therefore the school implements things that the parents don’t find out about until after it happens” (SA, P/W 2)

“Miss alignment of values. Lack of trust. Not wanting the same outcome” (SB, P/W 22)

4.3.3 Views on the methods used by the school to engage with them.

Parents and whānau were only surveyed about the methods that their school leaders were currently using and had identified. It was decided to approach it this way for two reasons. Firstly, so that parents and whānau were only being asked about methods they were familiar with and not any that might provide confusion or a sense of 'why are we not doing that', and secondly to enable the data generated to provide schools with some feedback on the effectiveness of what they are doing.

The main themes that came through from parents and whānau about their level of satisfaction with the methods used by senior leaders were their preference towards face to face engagement over other methods. While also having a variety of ways to engage for certain things was voiced by many.

Table 15 - Parent and whānau views on methods used by senior leaders.

Research Question	Main Themes	Sub Themes
<i>Are you happy with the methods that the senior leaders at your child's school use to engage with you?</i>	Parents and whānau like having various options to engage available to them should they be needed.	
	Face to face opportunities preferred.	

To illustrate the level of engagement parents and whānau have with the main methods used by their school, Fig 4 shows which are most favoured. As stated earlier, face to face engagement methods, such as open-door policy, parent interviews, and school/sporting events all rate high. It is here people feel genuine connections are made, and a greater understanding is achieved. It is also typically in these interactions where people feel most empowered.

In terms of communication, email, and phone texting systems, along with social media, were all used frequently. Their speed, ease of use, and simplicity make being involved easier for parents and whānau who are busy.

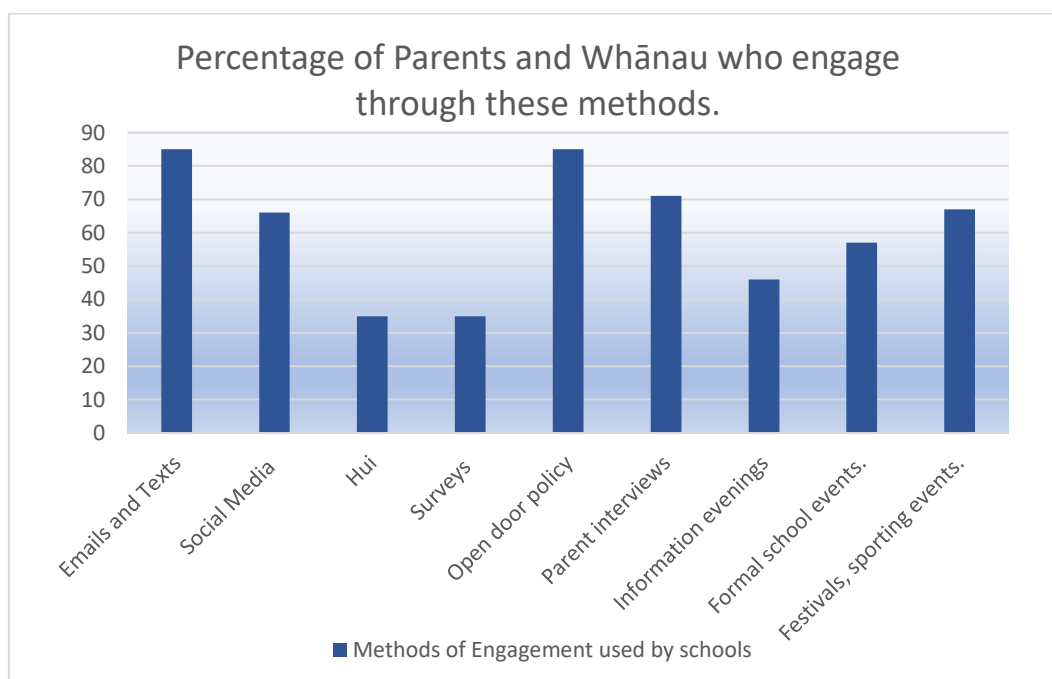


Figure 4 - Methods of engagement used by parents and whānau.

Interestingly, however, less than fifty per cent of the parents and whānau who responded to this survey stated that 'hui', 'surveys', and 'information evenings' were not something they engaged in often. Which is surprising since both hui and information evenings are a face to face way of discussing issues, where it could be assumed, they would have a voice. Further questioning might reveal the exact reason behind this anomaly, although it could be that the purpose of all three methods at the time were not communicated clearly or that people were simply not interested in supporting the topic.

Analysing what parents and whānau thought leads them to express how they were feeling. In regard to face to face engagement, they 'feel heard', 'feel most engaged', and 'feel connected'. All reliable indicators that this method provides a level of empowerment to them in these moments.

“Face to face is always better, no one can fob you off, and you feel heard even if opinions differ”. (SA, P/W 1)

“In-person events are the way in which I feel most engaged.” (SB, P/W 7)

“It is often easy to feel far removed from what your teenager is involved with once you drop them at the school gates. More whānau hui or face to face opportunities will help our family feel connected to the school and community.” (SB, P/W 16)

Interestingly, this last comment requested more whānau hui. According to the survey results, however, this is not an approach which many chose to participate in. Future research might explore what it is that people did not like about this method.

4.3.4 How engaging with the school has improved their child's learning.

Parents and whānau viewed the impact of engagement as positive on two main fronts. In one, it was seen as a way of sending strong signals to children about the level and types of support they have with their learning, while also demonstrating to them the importance of education. On the other front engagement was seen as a way to provide parents and whānau with the skills, knowledge, and understanding to better support and guide their child's education. This was not necessarily seen as enabling them to help with homework, instead the sense gained was that it empowered them to make more informed decisions, and know when and how to ask relevant questions to better support their child in their learning and education.

Table 16 - Benefit of engagement to child's learning.

Research Question	Main Themes	Sub Themes
<i>Do you feel that being engaged with the school has or would improve your child's learning?</i>	Engagement sends signals to a child.	Education is important
		Child is fully supported
		Communication between school and home
	Being engaged can lead to the empowering of parents and whānau.	On the same page with the school.
		Obtain skills and knowledge to participate and support their child's education, both at home and at school.
		Provides confidence to participate and contribute.

Engagement between home and school can be seen as a support net for students. Earlier, a senior leader commented on the benefit of engagement as being a wraparound system that supports the child and their learning. Here a parent is looking at that net from another perspective, one which helps manage and control the child's behaviour and development. Both perspectives place the student at the centre.

“When you're dealing with teenagers, it's important for them to see a united front from the adults in their lives. Otherwise, they'll see a gap and will hone in on it. I'll take any form of positive communication and interaction I can get in order to fulfil my obligation as a parent to teenage boys.” (SB, P/W 11)

Perceptions are important to parents and whānau. Those that result directly from engagement with the school are seen to hold strong messages of unity, the value of education, and shared ownership.

“It is important that our children know we are in contact with the school.” (SB, P/W 1)

“Without my involvement, the children would not see the learning as important.” (SB, P/W 15)

“Child has a sense of belonging and knows that they are surrounded by people who know them and where they come from, their history/family and that everyone is in this together.” (SB, P/W 26)

4.3.5 How engaging with the school has improved their sense of belonging.

As discussed previously, engagement was seen to foster the development of knowledge and understanding. This coupled with a further benefit - the growth of stronger connections builds the confidence of parents and whānau within the school setting. This provided not only a strong sense of belonging, but empowered them to use that confidence, along with their greater understanding to make informed decisions, and know when and how they can contribute to the growth of the school.

Table 17 - How engagement builds a sense of belonging.

Research Question	Main Themes	Sub Themes
<i>Do you feel that being engaged with the school has or would improve your sense of belonging to the school community?</i>	Builds relationships that provide connections to, and confidence within, school environment.	
	Develops understanding of how ‘things’ work in the school environment, and how they can contribute to that.	

Actively participating in events and getting to know the other members of the school community strengthens connections and a sense of belonging. It also allows for an appreciation of what others are doing and opens doors for people to explore commonalities.

“Makes you feel proud and included.” (SB, P/W 25)

“We love being part of the school community. Going to events helps us to keep in touch with our children’s teachers. I enjoy meeting with the teachers informally and know I can contact them for a more direct interview if I should need to.” (SB, P/W 1)

“Keeping up to date with what is happening at school and sharing achievements of the school makes you feel proud and more part of the school

"family", You also become more aware of the achievements of other students of the school, and it's nice to be able to congratulate them if you see them outside of school, which strengthens local communities." (SB, P/W 19)

"Certainly, helps build relationships and connections with the school and wider community." (SB, P/W 6)

"Gives you a connection to the community which is vital in small towns." (SB, P/W 20)

Engagement was essential in providing opportunities for parents and whānau so they can build a more explicit understanding of what happens in school, what they can do to support their child in their learning, and what they can do to help out with the growth of the school.

"It offers the opportunity to build relationships between school and whānau, space to learn how to participate in enhancing their child's school experience, learning the roles within school and how we can contribute to the growth of the school community." (SB, P/W 28)

"Yes, being engaged with the school fosters understanding and helps to identify ways that as parents, we can help out." (SB, P/W 29)

"School is a key community hub." (SB, P/W 13)

4.4 Document analysis

The documentation reviewed looked to gauge the intent on the part of the school to engage with parents and whānau, and then to understand how they planned to go about doing this. It was decided to only utilise the strategic plan and charter of each school, along with their latest ERO report.

4.4.1 The emphasis on engagement with parents and whānau.

Engagement held a different priority at different schools. While all schools saw parents and whānau as partners, not all wrote them into their plan for the growth of the school.

The tenure of the leadership teams also appears to have a strong correlation to the emphasis placed on engaging with parents and whānau. Those leaders most established in their roles prioritising the need to engage with parents and whānau.

Table 18 - Commitment to engagement.

Research Question	Main Themes	Sub Themes
<i>How much emphasis is there on engaging with parents and whānau?</i>	Engagement with parents and whānau given different priority at different schools.	Parents and whānau are seen as partners.
		Parent and whānau voice valued as a tool for planning and direction.
	Tenure of leadership appears to correlate with emphasis placed on engagement with parents and whānau.	

Speaking about the actions of senior leaders at one school, ERO stated:

“They have forged powerful learning partnerships with parents, whānau, iwi, and the wider community” (ERO Report SB, Oct 2019)

New evaluation indicators for schools supplied by ERO do not always point directly at a school’s specific levels of parent and whānau engagement. However, they do touch on those connections within the various explanations they make. Those that had received a high overall judgement, in terms of having effective practices for improvement and learner success, were the same schools which had a greater focus within their strategic plan on engaging with parents and whānau through deliberate acts.

While all schools mentioned at various points in their strategic plan about engaging with parents and whānau, only one of the three were consistent in their focus on that engagement throughout the document. This was confirmed in the different ERO reports where mention was only made of ‘communication and connections’ with parents and whānau at two of the schools, contrasting to comprehensive acknowledgement given to the third school about their deliberate acts of engaging with parents and whānau. This was their main key strategic goal and the strength of the leadership in forging partnerships and providing the systems to achieve the goal.

Putting things into context however, the two schools that did not rate as well in their reports were facing issues that the third either did not have or had already navigated its way through. That did not explain why engagement was not a priority goal for them, rather that they may feel they have higher priorities to address first before parent and whānau engagement could become a goal.

Furthermore, it was clear that the tenure of the leadership played a significant role in what was being done at each school. The school that placed engaging with parents and whānau as their number one goal had a leadership team that was well established with over seven years together, while the other two schools were only in their first and third years together. Discussions during the interviews highlighted the different issues each school was facing. However, it was interesting that one school believed it was best to gain the support of their parents and whānau to address their issues, while the other two had no plans suggesting this course of action.

4.4.2 A clear plan for engagement

Planning how each school was going to approach engaging with parents and whānau was not evident unless it was directly tied to a key strategic goal. When there was evidence, it was embedded in the strategic plan and set targets for the year. It also provided clear and deliberation actions of what to do to achieve these targets and goals. Unfortunately, they stopped short of specifying exactly how this was to be carried out. This information may be in other documents held by those tagged as responsible for the outcomes.

Table 19 - Planning for engagement.

Research Question	Main Themes	Sub Themes
<i>Is there a clear plan for engagement with parent and whānau?</i>	Planning was only present when tied to a key strategic goal.	Consistent connecting of parent and whānau engagement to all aspects of strategic plan.
		Clear actions to encourage engagement.

4.5 Summary

The research findings that have come out of this study reflect the respective views on engagement from parents, whānau, and school leaders as the key participants in home-school partnerships. School leaders articulated the various benefits and challenges they face when engaging with parents and whānau, along with a range of methods they used to build connections and cultivate power-sharing partnerships. Parents and whānau positioned themselves on what they felt engagement represented to them in their role as caregivers, what barriers they saw to engagement, and what methods used by the school allowed them to engage in a way that was both meaningful, and appropriate for them. Documents analysis provided further indications of the level of commitment schools have towards engaging with parents and whānau.

The main themes that emerged from the analysis were: the importance of engagement for everyone; the need to address issues from the past to remove barriers for engagement; understanding where parents and whānau are coming from; the critical role that school leaders play in ‘enabling’ engagement to occur; engagement can develop people, partnerships and outcomes through the use of a range of methods.

These themes will be discussed further in the next chapter, where they are considered in relation to the research question, and information gathered from the literature.

CHAPTER FIVE – Discussion

Ki te kore ngā pūtake e mākūkūngia, e kore te rākau e tupu

If the roots of a tree are not watered, the tree will never grow

5.1 Introduction

This study set out to identify and explore the various methods used by senior leaders in small town and rural New Zealand secondary schools to engage with their parent and whānau communities, identifying and acknowledging both the benefits and challenges that come with engagement.

In line with that goal, this chapter discusses what senior leaders and parents and whānau said in relation to the questions put forward for the study, and how this relates to the literature that was reviewed.

The chapter is structured following a similar sequence to previous chapters in terms of the key aspects considered, and uses these focus areas, along with their relevant contributing aspects, to guide the discussion. Links are made throughout this chapter to sections in both the literature review and the findings. This is done by way of referencing sections at points in the discussion that are linked to what is being said.

A three-stage engagement framework has been included here, not only to help structure the various types of engagement considered in terms of progressive developmental stages but also to illustrate how these types of engagement correlate with various traditional guiding principles used by Māori. These principles were reviewed in Chapter 2.1.2.2 and were visibility being practised in all the schools studied to some extent. Findings suggest there is an increased likelihood of successful engagement outcomes when the stages and principles are viewed and worked together.

5.2 Home-school partnership

Strong and effective home-school partnerships are a major objective for all schools to develop. They symbolise a power-sharing balance and commitment towards the health and

educational wellbeing of the young people who attend the school. They involve the coming together of parents, whānau, the staff of the school and the wider community they live in to guide and protect the development of the young.

This section looks at the main factors that contribute to the development, and maintenance, of strong home-school partnerships.

5.2.1 The importance of getting the balance right

Partnership is critical

All of the leaders the schools visited firmly believed that establishing and cultivating home-school partnerships is critical and plays a significant role in helping them move forward with students (Section 4.2.1). Berg et al. (2006) echoed this in their research, stating that partnerships are part of the on-going process to strengthen the school.

Helping each other

Leaders in small town and rural schools understand that schools and communities like theirs frequently lack the financial or material resources needed to always provide students with everything they need for their education, such as computers software, equipment, and facilities (Section 4.2.6). However, leaders also recognise that in these smaller towns and rural areas the communities are often tight-knit, and schools which are connected properly to the people within them often have access to a wide range of resources. This holistic view of the community as one which helps and supports each other was reinforced by parents and whānau when asked what motivates them to engage with the school (Section 4.3.1). They talked of contributing as part of the wider community that cares, where their contribution is seen as helping with the community wellbeing. This view of home-school partnerships as 'a bringing together of people and resources' is consistent with the literature. Robinson et al. (2007) not only speak of partnerships as a way to facilitate the sharing of resources and creating greater support networks but also of them providing opportunities for parents and whānau to embrace and then reinforce the learning strategies employed at school in the home context. The partnership also offers an opportunity for schools to enrich their cultural context to better reflect their client base, and reduce some of the disparity that is an issue in New Zealand schools. Berryman (2014) also sees the partnership as a way to help parents, whānau, and students feel more comfortable and 'belong' in schools.

Active participation to create a wraparound system

Furthermore, it is also viewed by all parties (Section 4.2.5, 4.3.5) that through this partnership parents and whānau become more active participants in their child's education. This joint approach is providing a wraparound system that fully supports both the student's wellbeing and their learning (Section 4.2.5).

Bringing people and resources together

This same fundamental view of home-school partnerships as 'a bringing together of people and resources' is consistent with literature also. Robinson et al. (2007) not only speak of these partnerships as a way to facilitate the sharing of resources and creating greater support networks but of also providing opportunities for parents and whānau to embrace and then reinforce the learning strategies employed at school but in the home context (Section 4.3.5).

Structuring the partnership

Interestingly, with the need for developing the partnership seemingly quite clear, how the schools structured the balance of the partnership is different. One school is quite liberal in the sharing of control with parents and whānau, providing many opportunities and areas where they can contribute to the life of the school on different levels, including leading roles within steering committees. The central theme is that of trialling and doing what works for them, which Fan and Chen (2001) suggest as building connections to resolve issues. The other two schools were more conservative in their approach. While they are also providing a range of opportunities for parents and whānau to contribute, and are utilising their feedback in planning, the level of influence afforded to parents and whānau is limited, and the school leadership maintains a firm grasp on the control and direction of the school.

One size does not fit all.

Significantly all senior leaders felt that there is no 'one size fits all' approach that works for everyone (Section 4.2.4). They recognise that working with people from a range of diverse backgrounds and cultures requires them to operate a flexible system that respects differences and provides a structure that most can feel comfortable within. This is a shift from the mono-cultural perspective and structuring that Lyutykh et al. (2016) described as often found in the education system.

This is also an opportunity for schools to enrich their cultural context to better reflect their client base, and reduce some of the disparity that is an issue in New Zealand schools. Berryman (2014) also viewing it as a way to help parents, whānau, and students feel more comfortable and ‘belong’ in schools.

5.2.2 The benefits

Spreading the load

In any successful partnership, it is ideal if everyone benefits in some way. Parent and whānau engagement brings a huge benefit to the schools. Research by Berg et al. (2006) shows that such partnerships reduce the load that school leaders have to carry, while also opening up communications so that everyone is on the same page. The benefits of having a united understanding around the direction the school is going while also providing students with a comprehensive support system involving home and school was promoted by school leaders (Section 4.2.5).

Additionally, the partnerships are bringing benefits to parents and whānau as well. Some of those highlighted were: opportunities to gain a greater understanding about their child’s education (Section 4.3.1); providing them chances to actively contribute to the school; and empowering them to monitor, guide and support their child’s wellbeing and their learning (Section 4.3.5). These tie in well with the research from Boonk et al. (2018), and Berg et al. (2006). Both groups espousing that greater understanding on the part of parents and whānau enables them to positively shape and influence the lives of their children. Parents and whānau in this study considered that their children also benefit by way of a more unified support network that they can draw on (Section 4.3.4).

Raised Student learning/achievement/confidence

Indications from each of the three schools were that student success rates had improved. This correlates with the research (Berryman, 2014; Biddulph et al., 2003; Epstein, 2004) indicating that improved learning outcomes are linked to successful home-school partnerships where parents and whānau are actively engaging with the education of their child.

None of the school leaders nor the research (Fan & Chen, 2001) could accurately identify what improvements were being made as a result of parent and whānau engagement but rather that student’s general overall learning and achievement has improved. Suggestions from both sources believe that having parents and whānau working closely with the school is

sending a strong message to the children - One that home and school are united, and that they are both taking education seriously (Section 4.3.1).

Parents and whānau also felt that their children behave better and engage more when they are actively watching and supporting what they are doing (Section 4.3.4). Robinson et al. (2007) speak of how having parents and whānau engaged with clear expectation for their child's educational achievement has a positive influence on outcomes.

Additionally, it is suggested by Pomerantz et al. (2007) that some of the improvement could also be put down to students own increased self-efficacy. Parents and whānau noted that as a result of them engaging with the school their child has shown a greater sense of belonging and is more motivated to do their best (Section 4.3.4)

Greater ownership and stronger communities

Research shows that parents and whānau can develop a range of skills and knowledge relating to education through their active participation in home-school partnerships (Quezada, 2016; Wainwright & Marandet, 2017). This collaboration is said to help build their confidence, enabling them to express their views and develop a greater sense of connectedness and sense of belonging to the school community (Pomerantz et al., 2007; Talò, 2018).

This correlates exactly with what parents and whānau reported regarding their engagement with their child's school. They saw the opportunities presented to them as a chance to forge stronger relationships with the school, to learn how to enhance their child's school experience, and to discover how things work within the school so that they contribute to its growth. (Section 4.3.5). This also relates to their main motivations for engaging (Section 4.3.1) and illustrates a real desire of parents and whānau to engage and participate.

5.2.3 Challenges

Personal circumstances – time constraints

The study found that parents and whānau do not always have the means to connect or engage with their child's school. Senior leaders were all of the consensus that this is due to a lack of finance (Section 4.2.6). In some instances, this relates to parents and whānau not being able to afford computers or data credit. However, most often, this inability to engage on a physical level is said to be because of their need to work and earn money (Section 4.2.6). This was again confirmed by parents and whānau (Section 4.3.2) who spoke of being limited

to digital engagement, or occasional parent conference events. Interestingly, research also refers to the impact that the cost of modern living has on parents and whānau. It highlights their lack of engagement with schools, but also with their children (Section 2.5.3).

Location

Research by Truscott and Truscott (2005) pointed out the significant challenges that rural schools face as a result of their location. Limited school facilities, high unemployment rates and increased diversity brought about by families relocating due to the rising cost of living in urban areas, all of which place extra pressure on schools and families. This belief was supported by senior leaders who talked of families having to commute out of their area to find employment and leave to find cheaper places to live (Section 4.2.6), which again limits the time available for people to engage with the school. Parents and whānau also highlighted these issues and that of the constraint of transport based on their physical location to the school (Section 4.3.2).

Bad experiences in the past

It was found that past experiences play a significant role in the motivation of parents and whānau engaging with the school. Some of these experiences are based around recent events (Section 4.3.2), however many are historical, from a time when they, the parents were at school (Section 4.2.6), or even before that, as the experiences of their ancestors whose stories have been carried through as scars (Section 4.3.2). Although the findings did not identify the total numbers or ethnicity of those who fit into this category of people who avoid engagement based on bad past experiences, it could be assumed that due to the high Maori population in these areas and schools, and when comparing this to the research of Bishop and Glynn (1999), and Berryman, Eley, et al. (2015), which outlines the poor treatment Maori have endured, that these are the people whom schools need to support in ways that help build trust in the education system.

5.2.4 Ingredients for success

Valuing people, and things of importance.

Senior leaders all talked of the need to make themselves available for parents and whānau and to value what they have to say (Section 4.2.1, 4.2.7). However, this was not always the situation according to parents and whānau (Section 4.3.2). This emphasises the need for school leaders to continually reflect on what is happening in both their school and their

community as well as being aware of how they are feeling, while also having systems in place so that parents and whānau can express their opinions and any concerns. Berryman (2014) speaks of aligning the values and beliefs of all parties in the partnership to avoid mistrust and misunderstanding.

A further aspect of valuing people found revolves around valuing those things that parents, whānau and the wider community hold as important (Section 4.2.3). This could involve acknowledging certain events or following certain tikanga when doing things within the school. The theme that comes through is to seek the advice of those in the community that know, valuing their input, and to do things the right way in the eyes of the people (Section 4.2.7).

Having a shared vision

Research showed that developing a shared vision is fundamental to bringing people together and building strong home-school partnerships (Section 2.2.4). Schools also talked about the only real way to incorporate what the community values into the vision is to include them in the process of developing one (Section 4.2.7). However, there was little evidence of these intentions in two of the schools planning documents (Section 4.4.1), and all preferred to get feedback on their ideas rather than co-constructing a clear vision based on the wants and needs of the parents and whānau.

Clear communication

Communication underpins everything that happens in the home-school partnership. School leaders speak of clearly communicating what is valued in the school as well as what they are doing (Section 4.2.2) whereas parents and whānau see communication as providing clarity and transparency into an area where they feel obliged to be but do not fully understand (Section 4.3.4). Furthermore, they also see the communication between home and school as a way of sending messages to their children – one of unity and support. These views are consistent with the research (Section 2.2.4) which speaks further of how this communication leads to greater buy-in from parents and whānau when new initiatives are developed in the school, while also cautioning that leaders must listen to parents and whānau rather than just telling them what they plan to do.

5.3 Parents and Whānau

5.3.1 Understanding where they are coming from

The diversity of people in New Zealand requires that to ensure school leaders are connecting with, and meeting the needs of parents and whānau, they must first have an understanding of where everyone is coming from.

This is a considerable undertaking for school leaders, however, in smaller rural schools where student numbers are lower, and the communities often more closely connected, they must know and understand the needs of their parents and whānau to be able to package things in a way that works for them.

Know the people – who are they and what are their stories

During the seven conversations held with senior leaders, all spoke of the need to know their students, know their whānau, and know their community (Section 4.2.6). This knowledge was allowing them to connect with the needs of each family. Boonk et al. (2018) stress a similar requirement of leaders, to better understand the needs and experiences of all their parents and whānau so that they appreciate each families situation, know what support is required, and where possible navigate issues and engage in ways that work for each family.

Knowing the people also allows schools to support families who are struggling but reluctant to come forth and ask for help. Some of these issues are based around a lack of income or education, which leaders point to as one of their biggest challenges to engagement (Section 4.2.6). This view was supported by one parent comment which explained their reason for not engaging with the school being due to a lack of support, communication skills, and feeling whakama (ashamed) when they cannot afford to pay for something (Section 4.3.1).

Know the community

As evidenced in the data from schools (Section 4.2.6), it is essential that schools know as much as they can about the community in which they are situated. This aides in both the development of relationships and in the strategic planning of ways to advance the school while respecting and reflecting the values of the community (Education Review Office, 2016).

Communicate meaningfully

Parents and whānau are not trained educators, and yet in their role as primary caregivers, they are often required to make decisions that impact the education of their child. Schools,

therefore, need to ensure that what they say and how they say it is presented and fully understood by all the parents and whānau. Frequently this is not the case (Section 4.3.2), leaving some parents and whānau confused, intimidated, and mistrusting the leaders in the school.

5.4 School leadership

5.4.1 Roles and responsibilities

A role model in the community

Research says that school leaders need to be active participants in the events of their community (Berg et al., 2006), building relationships and role modelling what engagement looks like. One school leader spoke of always attending whatever the community put on, and in so doing, sending a strong message to parents and whānau regarding their commitment to the partnership (Section 4.2.7).

Two-way communication

It was found that each of the schools placed importance on maintaining two-way communication (Section 4.2.7). Each espoused the use of an open-door policy; however, feedback from some parents and whānau suggests that this is not the case (Section 4.3.2), and they are reluctant to engage as they feel the school is not approachable.

Deliberate acts

The documents reviewed illustrated the level of intent and commitment by each school towards their parent and whānau community (Section 4.4.1). Two of the schools only showed up as having communications and connections with their parent and whānau community. In contrast, the third school presented deliberate acts of engagement with parents and whānau as well. Interestingly, the leaders of the school that planned deliberate acts report higher levels of frequent parent and whānau engagement, which also correlates with the level of responses received in this study.

5.4.2 Creating a vision that belongs to everyone

Give parents and whānau a voice.

The uniqueness of each small town and rural community in New Zealand compels each school partnership to create their own vision for what they want their learning environment to look like. Berg et al. (2006) propose that this is a task that falls to the whole community. Senior leaders voiced the opinion that to move forward and make things a reality, everyone

needs to be on the same page and working together (Section 4.2.5). This stops short of committing to the co-construction of a unified vision and could be seen as one of the reasons for lack of engagement. Parents and whānau, on the other hand, spoke of a desire to contribute, be involved in decision making, and be part of a team that is working for the benefit of their children and the community (Section 4.3.2).

Seek input from the community

Significantly all of the leaders felt that local ‘experts’ were essential for providing advice and guidance on local customs and values (Section 4.2.7). Making sure the tikanga is observed, and the decisions made reflect the values of the community and the characteristics that make each place different. Berryman (2014) extends this further by suggesting that while the mana whenua no longer own the land, they should still be active participants of what happens on the land.

5.4.3 Bring people together

Creating a welcoming environment

It was very evident that the school with the highest level of parent and whānau engagement is the one that is making a conscious effort to develop an environment that reflects genuine openness and is trying to connect with people on several different personal levels (Section 4.2.7). This coincides with the research of Berryman (2014) which refers to schools needing to establish a place where parents and whānau feel comfortable and are viewed by others, and themselves, as belonging and being part of the school.

Facilitate events

The study identified that positive engagement with parents and whānau often occurs at informal or social events (Section 4.2.2). This not only highlights the need for senior leaders to be at these types of events but that they should also try and facilitate these wherever possible. This combined with all the formal events that school run provides them with several opportunities to actively communicate and promote the vision of the school, and in doing so to inspire and encourage parents and whānau to become more engaged with school (Robinson et al., 2007).

Provide opportunities

Surprisingly, only one of the seven senior leaders mentioned running information and learning sessions for parents and whānau. Research suggests it is in these types of sessions

where parents and whānau learn the educational skills and knowledge which can help them provide better support for their child at home (Education Review Office, 2016). It is also through these opportunities where parents and whānau develop a deeper understanding of how schools operate, giving them confidence and empowering them to participate in decision making roles within the school.

Consideration needs to be made when providing these opportunities to ensure that they suit the lifestyle of parents and whānau. As previously discussed, (Section 5.2.3) time constraints often impede parent and whānau engagement, so it would, therefore, be necessary for these opportunities to run at a time, and in a way that works for them.

5.4.4 Sorting out the elephants

Addressing issues from the past

In their research, Witziers et al. (2003) assert that it is the role of the senior leaders in a school to develop and sustain the culture of the school. Berg et al. (2006) add that they also need to address cultural issues and distinguish between assumptions and facts. One of the issues that this study found was that there is a lot of mistrust towards schools and the education system, particularly by parents and whānau of Māori descent. In some cases, this stems from their own time at school as a student (Section 4.2.6; 4.3.2), while in others it is based around the stories that have been passed down through the family over generations. The dilemma for senior leaders now is how to confront historical issues which they were never a part of, and cannot undo.

*"One of the battles I am facing is the stereotype that because the kids are Maori, they should be fluent in Te Reo, customs, procedures and basic values – no they are not, and you do not have to look any further than our whānau, and the struggles they have been through, and it is a generational thing." SC
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The current education system places a strong focus on honouring The Treaty of Waitangi, creating sustainable partnerships with Māori, and delivering the New Zealand curriculum in a culturally responsive manner to reduce disparity across all learners (Education Review Office, 2016). These areas of focus imply that all schools need to provide Māori with the partnership they were promised in The Treaty, and the control (or at least partly) over their 'taonga' (treasures), which included their language and their culture (Bishop & Glynn, 1999). Schools are well placed to achieve all of this by developing both language-appropriate

and culturally appropriate practices (Kugler, 2012), and by working with local iwi to adopt the local tikanga as a guide for the school.

Māori learning methods

As a consequence of much of the suffering that Māori have endured over the many generations since colonisation, there has become embedded disconnect and mistrust of the education system and those running the institutions. As these institutions were established, they stripped away many aspects of the Māori culture and their way of life, including their methods of learning. Rata (2009), and Metge (1995) both speak of this time and the impact that it had on the way that Māori processed knowledge and developed an understanding of their new world. They discuss the lack of connection between the Māori people, the education system, and the unfamiliar way they were being taught. Today, school leaders still have to address the effects of the past as they try to engage with parents and whānau (Section 4.2.6). The senior leaders in this study also voiced their reality of how they are often struggling to connect and move forward with students, particularly Māori, and how critical engagement with parents and whānau is in helping the school to support students as they progress in their learning (Section 4.2.1).

In the absence of traditional learning methods, Māori have still been able to maintain and pass on the traditional concepts used to guide their way of life. As discussed in chapter two (Section 2.2.2), these concepts provide guidance on how partnerships should be structured, strengthened, and nurtured. These concepts were evident at each of the schools in the study. Some aspects were visual in terms of signs promoting the concepts directly, other aspects were woven into the conversations that took place with each senior leader about their practices, such as serving parents and whānau (manaakitanga), valuing differences and knowing the people (whanaungatanga), using experts from the community to guide best practice (ako), and working in partnership with parents and whānau to achieve positive outcomes for the students (mahi tahi) (Section 4.2.1, 4.2.5, 4.2.6, 4.2.7).

Additionally, the feedback from parents and whānau also reinforced that these concepts were in practice when they spoke of being part of the school family (whanaungatanga), getting a sense of belonging from the unity of working together as a team (mahi tahi, kotahitanga), being part of a community that cares (manaakitanga), and reciprocal engagement where everyone contributes to each other (Ako) (Section 4.3.1, 4.3.5).

5.5 Engagement

This section looks at understanding the application of the concepts that guide strong home-school partnerships; the various methods used by the schools that were studied; the types of engagement that help a school grow and develop; and a framework that ties these all together to enable school leaders to evaluate where their home-school partnership is placed, and where they can focus more attention.

Engagement is a concept where different groups or individuals interact in various ways to form a connection that is reciprocal and mutually beneficial for a specific purpose (Welch, 2016). While it is often seen as pre-determined deliberate acts for a specific intended outcome, engagement can also be constantly developing as partnerships strengthen and the people within them seize opportunities to grow and contribute more (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2014).

5.5.1 Guiding concepts

The following concepts are now recognised in many New Zealand schools as enabling equity and excellence (Education Review Office, 2016): Tikanga, Kotahitanga, Mahi tahi, Manaakitanga, Whānaungatanga, and Ako. There is a general view that these concepts will be taught or held as values that students, teachers, and school leaders should be following. The application of these was spoken about by all the leaders interviewed. Not always directly, but woven into how they viewed and approached engagement with parents, whānau and the wider community.

Tikanga

Tikanga ('the right way' of doing things, Section 2.2.2) was spoken of directly by all senior leaders (Section 4.2.3, 4.2.7), in terms of each school honouring their connection with their local iwi, and seeking guidance from them on 'the right way' when doing things of importance. The view was that this approach would ensure relationships are maintained while also reflecting a commitment by the school to valuing what the local people believe is important in their unique setting.

Kotahitanga

When asked about solidarity between their school and parents and whānau, senior leaders were, in reality, defining the state of Kotahitanga (solidarity), (Section 2.2.2) amongst the people (Section 4.2.8). In line with research around how kotahitanga represents a state when

everyone is united (Section 2.2.2), the leaders described the ideal situation as one where parents and whānau become actively involved in decision making and take ownership, along with the staff of the school, for the growth and outcomes of the school.

Mahi Tahi

Working collaboratively was a constant theme for both senior leaders (Section 4.2.1, 4.2.5, 4.2.7) and parents and whānau (Section 4.3.1, 4.3.4, 4.3.5). Mahi tahi describes the unity and connection between home and school. In action, it displays the commitment of all the people involved working together, focused on the attainment of a shared goal. This joining of efforts is an essential aspect of the home-school partnership, not only for the development of successful learning outcomes for students, but also to help strengthen the connections and build the relationship between parents, whānau, and school leaders and staff.

Manaakitanga

Manaakitanga describes the obligation of a host to care for the wellbeing of visitors. This was seen as a priority by the leaders who believed the needs of the parents, whānau, and community must come first (Section 4.2.1). This same responsibility to the care and respect of people was evident as leaders discussed methods of engagement intended to provide opportunities and valuing what parents and whānau had to offer (Section 4.2.7).

Whānaungatanga

Whānaungatanga is an important part of both Māori and New Zealand culture. It is through the connections and links to other people that one's own identity is confirmed. Having this as a guiding concept between schools, parents, whānau and the wider community shapes the nature of any partnership developed by providing people with an opportunity to place themselves within the partnership through their engagement, and by building a sense of belonging and connection as part of being a member.

Through the schools following the local tikanga, and adopting the values that the community hold as important, senior leaders consider that they too become an expression of that tikanga, and an embodiment of those values (Section 4.2.7), every time they do something in the school. It was also acknowledged by parents and whānau that strong and respectful home-school connections provide their children with a greater sense of belonging and confidence knowing that the people around them know who they are and where they come from (Section 4.3.4).

Ako

Ako represents both parties in a partnership sharing knowledge and learning from each other. The leaders from one school spoke explicitly about using this paradigm when they seek guidance from the community on good practice (Section 4.2.7). Research also suggests that ako further strengthen home-school partnerships (Education Review Office, 2016), as people become both educator and learner.

5.5.2 Methods that work in the context

The findings of this study are that all the leaders felt the methods that they were using to communicate and connect were effective for the parents and whānau in their community, however, they also all stated that no one way allows them to engage with all the parents and whānau. Furthermore, one of the leaders identified the issue of needing to re-excite people regarding the methods they are using (Section 4.2.4). Their feeling was that over time parents and whānau have become so familiar with what the school was doing that they choose not to engage fully, working instead on the assumption that if the process looks the same, then the message or connections are the same. This suggests there is a constant need for school leaders to be reviewing the methods of engagement they use, through consultation with parents and whānau, to ensure their effectiveness and acceptability.

Most of the methods used by the school were chosen due to their ease of delivery, or because over time, they have shown to be used by more people. Some methods, on the other hand, were no longer used, such as live reporting in one school. This was due to a lack of engagement and the school having no real way of ensuring that parents and whānau were fully comprehending what was being presented to them.

Interestingly, parents and whānau at the schools were overwhelming in favour of face to face engagement where they can have a voice (Section 4.3.3). Several felt it gave them a greater sense of connection in that moment, while others believe it empowers them more and their opinions are heard (Section 4.3.3). In terms of the simple communication of information, digital media was preferred as opposed to paper or voice options.

The following table illustrates which methods were most favoured by parents and whānau; what the various methods are primarily being used for within schools; and how the methods provide opportunities for parents and whānau to engage, develop and contribute more to the school.

Table 20 - Methods of engagement favoured most by parents and whānau.

Methods of engagement favoured most by parents and whānau		
Methods/Usage	Engagement purpose	Involvement/ Empowerment/ Solidarity
Emails and texts: 85%	Two-way communication used primarily to provide information.	Involvement/Empowerment Provides information that involves parents and whānau in discussions, but can also empower them with knowledge they can then act upon.
Social Media: 66%	Possible two-way communication. Mainly used one-way, school ⇒ home to provide information.	Involvement/Empowerment Provides information that involves parents and whānau in discussions, but can also empower them with knowledge they can then act upon.
Hui: 33%	Face to face conversations, providing all parties with a voice on the topic of discussion.	Involvement/Empowerment. Depending on the level of active participation in discussions and resulting from the discussion.
Surveys: 33 %	Gather information or feedback from a range of participants on given questions.	Involvement/Empowerment Opportunity for parents and whānau to feedback or share views on given questions.
Open door policy: 85%	Face to face opportunity for people to talk.	Involvement/Empowerment Allows parents and whānau to voice concerns or discuss issues at a time suitable to them
Parent interviews: 71%	Face to face conversations to obtain feedback on a child's progress and ask questions.	Involvement Provides information for parents and whānau to monitor their child's progress and empower them with knowledge and strategies they can use to support their child at home.
Information evenings: 46%	Face to face opportunity to hear and learn about set topics of discussion, ask questions, and develop a deeper understanding of things relating to the education of their child.	Involvement/Empowerment Supplies information to parents and whānau, which they then can use to support their child's education or empower them to actively contribute to the life of the school.
Formal school events: 57%	Formal gathering to share or acknowledge students success or discuss issues relevant to the growth of the school. Possible face to face discussions on other topics.	Involvement/Empowerment Opportunity for parents and whānau to see and participate in set activities. Including the organisation and running of events.

Festival/sporting events: 67%	Informal interactions at social or sporting events where face to face discussions on other topics can be held.	<p>Involvement/Empowerment</p> <p>Opportunity for parents and whānau to participate in the organisation and running of events.</p>
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5.5.3 Types of engagement

Involvement, empowerment, and solidarity are three types of engagement that reflect the level of connection and contribution that exists between parents and whānau and their child's school. These also represent progressive stages for parents and whānau as they become more engaged with the school and the partnership between home-school strengthens.

Involvement

Involvement takes various forms within home-school partnerships. Senior leaders felt it is typified by parents and whānau turning up or tuning in to things, but not necessarily contributing back to the school (Section 4.2.8). It often revolves around them merely staying connected to gain an understanding of what their child is doing at school (Section 4.3.5). Other reasons, which came from parents and whānau, were to ensure that health or behaviour issues their child might have, were being looked after and to know who is involved in their child's day (Section 4.3.1). Involvement can also take on the form of parents and whānau participating in activities or discussions, taking away information and applying strategies at home that relate to the education of their child (Section 2.5.5).

Empowerment

Empowerment is associated with providing people with a certain level of control, power, or authority in and over a situation (Section 2.5.5). Parents and whānau in this study said that one of their reasons for engagement is to learn the roles within the school and to see how they can contribute to the growth of the school community (Section 4.3.5). However, leaders did not speak of providing roles for parents and whānau, other than them joining committees. However, they did identify the benefits of having parents and whānau contribute to moving the school forward (Section 4.2.5).

Surprisingly, none of the schools in the study spoke of running training sessions for parents and whānau, apart from one who occasionally runs numeracy and literacy classes for adults. According to New Zealand Ministry of Education (2014), it is through these

opportunities to learn skills and knowledge that parents and whānau gain the confidence and understanding to be actively involved in decision-making and become influential in the school system. These opportunities also raise the awareness of parents and whānau around what is possible for their child. This, in turn, increases their expectations for their child's education, which Boonk et al. (2018) show improves student learning outcomes.

Furthermore, the research of Brewster and Railsback (2003) suggests that empowering people by providing training sessions fosters a sense of ownership and belonging. Parents, whānau and senior leaders all saw that increased engagement and empowerment is the way to building a greater sense of belonging (Section 4.2.8, 4.3.5).

Solidarity

Johnson (2012) points out that if schools want the support of parents and whānau, they must make empowering them with knowledge and including them in decision making a top priority, laying the platform for a sense of ownership and belonging to develop at the same time. According to Metge (1995), solidarity as a type of engagement only occurs when parents and whānau have that sense of oneness or kotahitanga. One school leader describing their work with parents and whānau in a way that was consistent with this form when they described building towards ownership and a sense of pride in what they ultimately achieve (Section 4.2.8). It is only through these enduring connections forged during mahi tahi (shared experiences and working together) that Berryman, Nevin, et al. (2015) believe solidarity and a sense of belonging are created.

5.5.4 A framework to guide parent and whānau development in schools

This three-stage framework represents the progression of parents and whānau as they become more engaged with their child's school. It illustrates that as they begin with basic involvement, they engage in certain activities. As they progress, learn new skills and knowledge about their child's education, grow more confident, and potentially have more time, they become more empowered and may choose to contribute more towards the development of the school as well as their child. Solidarity comes as parents and whānau blend their sense of empowerment with a sense of belonging that develops as the school leaders share with parents and whānau opportunities to contribute further and influence the growth of the school.

The leaders at all three schools acknowledged that their parents and whānau community is at different stages for different reasons (Section 4.2.6, 4.3.1, 4.3.2).

Using and applying this three-stage engagement framework will allow senior leaders in schools to identify where certain parents or whānau members are placed in terms of engagement, what challenges they may be facing which could be impeding engagement, and what they as leaders of the school can potentially do to improve the engagement.

Table 21 – Three-stage framework of engagement.

Three-stage framework of engagement					
Stage	Types of engagement	Descriptors of engagement	Possible challenges	What schools can do to improve engagement	Guiding concepts
1	Involvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Two-way communication with the school. *Attending events and group meetings. *Monitoring child's progress and learning both at home and at school. *Interacting with teachers. *Supporting child at home with schoolwork. *Having expectations for child's education. *Working with school staff to produce better outcomes for their child. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Parents and whānau may lack connectivity or data at home to respond or engage. *Home/work commitments may mean that parents and whānau cannot spare the time to engage. *Bad past experiences mean there is no connection to the school and/or education. *Parents and whānau lack the skills and knowledge to support learning at home. *Lack of clear communication from the school. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Make engagement easy-plan and offer engagement methods that suit parents and whānau lifestyle. *Promote benefits of engagement to parents and whānau. *Establish two-way communication and open-door policy. *Role model engagement and attend functions in the community. *Identify and address any issues from the past. *Provide opportunities for parents and whānau to learn educational skills and knowledge. *Value things that the community values. *Deliver clear, meaningful communication. *Offer a range of ways people can engage with. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Mahi tahi *Ako *Manaakitanga *Whānaungatanga
2	Empowerment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Join committees and workgroups. *Provide feedback to the school on discussions. *Interact at school events or meetings. *Attend training sessions. *Volunteering in the school. *Managing extracurricular activities. *Actively involved in governance. *Organising events with the school. *Setting goals and expectations for child's education. *Actively supporting their child's learning at home. *Participate in decision making. *Proactively working with school staff to produce better outcomes for their child. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Parents and whānau may live far from school making face to face engagement more challenging. *There is a lack of connection with the school and parents and whānau do not feel welcome. *Parents and whānau lack the skills, knowledge, and confidence to contribute at this level. *Parents and whānau do not have the time to commit and contribute to activities at this level. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Seek support from the local community. *Provide meaning opportunities for people to contribute to running and organising events. *Include parents and whānau in decision-making opportunities. *Be clear and transparent in everything the school does. *Co-construct the vision of the school with parents, whānau and the local community. *Provide parents and whānau with opportunities to learn about how the school operates and how they can contribute. *Know your community and acknowledge and value differences. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Mahi tahi *Ako *Manaakitanga *Whānaungatanga

3	Solidarity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Organising events for the school. *Proactively working with school staff to produce better outcomes for all children. *Actively influence and contribute to the decision making processes in the school. *Coordinate resources and services between the school and the wider community. * Drive and coordinate efforts in the wider community to support the school. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Not sufficient opportunities for parents and whānau to contribute in decision-making activities. *Lack of willingness by leaders to share aspects of control and running of the school with parents and whānau. *Parents and whānau lack the skills, knowledge, and confidence to contribute at this level. *Parents and whānau do not have the time to commit and contribute to activities at this level. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Promote contribution to the school as contribution to the community. *Provide parents and whānau with opportunities to learn and contribute at this level. *Build trust and confidence through consistent actions that support the values of the school. *Celebrate success of all as the vision of the school develops. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Mahi tahi *Ako *Manaakitanga *Whānaungatanga *Kotahitanga
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5.6 Summary

This chapter has explored the connections between the insights from the research in relation to the questions put forward for the study asking what engagement methods are used with parents and whānau by senior leaders in three small town and rural New Zealand schools. These were identified, along with the benefits and challenges faced during the engagement. All were then looked at further to see how they correlated with the literature that was reviewed in chapter two. This process illustrated that there are fundamental concepts that need to be followed to ensure strong partnerships develop and are sustained. Different types of engagement were also presented in a manner that demonstrates where and how most of the engagement within a school is occurring, and where senior leaders can focus their attention to improve engagement and strengthen the partnership.

The various methods of engagement identified differed slightly at some schools due to personal preferences and challenges faced by the parent and whānau community. The functionality of the methods also contributing to whether or not senior leaders chose to use them.

A three-stage engagement framework has been developed based on the findings of this study and presented as a guide senior leaders can use to inform actions to improve engagement and strive toward greater solidarity where parents and whānau have a greater sense of ownership and belong at the school. The framework structures three types of engagement and their descriptors into progressive stages. These represent where parents and whānau who are actively participating with the school are placed in term of being involved, empowered, or in solidarity. It also aligns these types of engagement with various traditional guiding principles used by Māori.

CHAPTER SIX – Conclusion

Ahokoa he iti he pounamu

Despite being small you are of great value

6.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a summary of the key findings, along with implications for school leaders, teachers, and policymakers. The key findings obtained from the research, and in conjunction with the literature reviewed, are that: engagement between parents, whānau and school leaders is essential to developing successful home-school partnership; senior leaders play a critical role in developing these partnerships; a range of contextual factors must be understood and considered when leaders are planning ways of engaging with their parents and whānau community; monitoring engagement allows leaders to see what types of engagement need to occur to support the development of solidarity in the home-school partnership in their community.

The main implications are that senior leaders need to: know, understand, and respect their community; build strong partnerships; provide parents and whānau with meaningful opportunities to engagement, and model what engagement looks like. Teachers have an important role to play in nurturing the home-school partnership and promoting engagement. While policymakers have an opportunity to influence the direction of home-school partnerships, and advocate the benefits of engagement.

This chapter also includes suggestions for further study which could build on the research that has been conducted for this thesis, and a section on the benefits I have received as a result of undertaking this study.

6.2 Summary of key findings

The development of home-school partnerships were seen as a significant aspect of their role by the school leaders, and their commitment to this partnership was characterised by deliberate acts to initiate engagement with parents and whānau. Furthermore, engagement

with the leaders and staff of the school increased the sense of belonging that parents and whānau felt with the school because this provided them with opportunities to contribute to the growth and development of their child and the school. Senior leaders all believed that meeting the needs of parents and whānau was a priority, along with their role of establishing a respectful environment, which acknowledges differences and creates the conditions for successful engagement. To do this requires school leaders to know their community, understand where they are situated, and what the needs of the parents and whānau are.

Schools in the study used a range of engagement methods in a variety of settings, both formal and informal, yet all the senior leaders agreed that there is no one way of engaging parents and whānau that suits them all. Face to face engagement was preferred by parents and whānau as they felt it provided them with a greater connection to the school and assurance that their opinions were being heard. Open-door policies and parent conferences were the most favoured forms/methods chosen by parents and whānau.

In terms of simply staying connected with what is happening in the school and up to date with information relating to the education of their child, parents and whānau preferred digital methods of delivery. This was reported by parents and whānau to be primarily due to the ease of use, and simplicity of the systems that the schools were using. However, it was also related to the time pressures that many of them are under, making engagement in general challenging. Further challenges to engagement were a lack of resources (equipment at home, personal finances), and in some instances, a sense of not being welcome or listened to. Some of these sentiments were based on bad experiences from the past which have left parents and whānau with feelings of mistrust and a lack of connection to the school and education. This was the case for some parents and whānau who struggled to connect with the schools due to historical issues, even though the schools and their leadership had changed.

Traditional concepts used by Māori to guide their way of life are being employed in schools as a way of teaching and guiding practices that build partnerships and strengthen relationships. Senior leaders spoke directly about how they are integrating local tikanga into their school practices and using the concepts of Mahi Tahi, Manaakitanga, Whānaungatanga, and Ako as foundations for how they approach meaningful partnerships with parents and whānau, as they are for other school practices.

The rural location and context of the schools in this study highlighted additional factors school leaders needed to consider when developing engagement strategies. The distance families live and work from town and the school, and often a lack of finance to be able to afford to travel in for meetings makes engagement problematic for parents and whānau.

Viewing their engagement with parents and whānau using the three-stage framework proposed allowed senior leaders to place where their parent and whānau community are in terms of their level of connection, contribution within the partnership. This also illustrated to the leaders what they needed to focus on doing to build, strengthen, and in some cases re-energise, the home-school partnership and to increase engagement (Section 5.5.4).

6.3 Implications

For Senior Leaders

Senior leaders in schools have a responsibility to set the culture of the school environment. Within the Aotearoa (New Zealand) context leaders have a responsibility to develop strong home-school partnerships, systems that are supportive of all parties within these partnerships, and role model practices and expectations of what engagement and working together should look like.

Findings from this study suggest that a productive culture of partnership is based on firm shared principles which everyone can learn and apply. These include the concepts of Mahi tahi, Whānaungatanga, Manaakitanga, and Ako. Choosing to adopt or incorporate the local tikanga into part of a school's 'ways of doing things', means that parents and whānau are likely to feel comfortable engaging with the school, therefore building stronger connections between home and school.

Senior leaders need to know the community that the school is situated in, understand what people value, where they are situated, and what are their stories. Only then can the school begin to align their values with those of their community. This should be done by consulting with parents and whānau, providing them with an opportunity to help develop a shared vision for the school and their child education, and include them in future decision making through further consultation (hui, information evenings, survey's). To ensure the effectiveness of this consultation, leaders need to provide parents and whānau opportunities to learn new skill

and knowledge relating to the education of their child and growing the school. However, these opportunities to engage must be at times and in ways that suit parents and whānau.

Staying connected with parents and whānau and monitoring their engagement is essential. Using a system like the three-stage framework of engagement is one way school leaders could understand how and where parent and whānau engagement is happening and where it is not. The framework could also be used to support leaders to find other ways they might improve engagement. Incorporating engagement with parents and whānau into the school strategic plan along with clear systems and actions to follow is another way school leaders can use to increase engagement, as seen in this study.

For Teachers

Teachers have an essential role to play in promoting parent and whānau engagement. Findings of this study suggest they need to role model what engagement might look like along with the values of the school in a manner that is consistent with what the senior leaders are promoting to the parents, whānau, and the wider community. This will show parents and whānau that what is espoused is embedded within the school culture and demonstrates consistency in the practices of the school.

Furthermore, leaders also spoke of teachers needing to know, understand, and respect the diversity of all their students and their families. Ensuring that all communication is done clearly and in a meaningful manner that parents and whānau understand.

For Policy Makers

Policymakers have an opportunity to influence and encourage schools to establish home-school partnerships. However, rather than stopping short and just advising schools on what they should be doing, policymakers could explore how they could provide leaders with research-based guidance on how schools could set up and sustain critical partnerships as well as the benefits that arise for schools and communities.

6.4 Further study

Further study is needed to refine conclusions reached in this study. Ideally, this research would be conducted on a larger scale, focused more on investigating reasons why parents and whānau did or did not like certain methods of engagement along with concentrating on

how schools might employ those methods. This would require more time in each school to observe practices rather than relying only upon interviews and other commentary which can often be generalised.

The application of the three-stage engagement framework over a period of time could also be explored to gauge its effectiveness in identifying where parents and whānau are placed in relation to partnership processes, and where efforts should most productively be focused to improve engagement and develop solidarity between parents, whānau and the school.

Further study beyond this could look at the comparison between urban to rural contexts, identifying what works best in each, looking at any differences, and developing an understanding of why these differences might occur. This further study could also include trialling the three-stage engagement framework in both contexts to measure the level of transferability.

6.5 Conclusion

Looking at this study on a personal level, it has shown me that there are many factors that need to be considered as impacting on the engagement of schools with parents and whānau. Leaders need to know their communities, and they need to be connected with them in ways that are meaningful to the community. They also need to constantly nurture the partnerships that are formed. Trust and ‘doing things the right way’ are critical components in school-community partnerships and must be developed over time and in a respectful manner. Failure to pay care and attention to partnerships, and the people in them, will limit engagement and reduce the potential benefits that can be achieved.

I was also made aware of the potential value of using a system to look at home-school partnerships holistically, with this incorporating a method to monitor the progress and development of parents and whānau as they engage with the school, and also any shifts in teachers and the school culture. The study has also alerted me to the way guiding concepts that promote unity, caring, and working and learning together, help ensure the journey that the school, parents, whānau, students, and the wider community take together is more meaningful and hence is more likely to produce the desired benefits for everyone.

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APPENDIX A - Invitation Letter to Parents and Whānau

Kia Ora

My name is David Kallahar and I am currently undertaking a research project through the University of Waikato to complete my Master of Educational Leadership Degree. The thesis I am writing is titled: *Engaging the parent/whānau community: Methods, benefits, and challenges for senior leaders in small town and rural schools*. Research shows that strong home-school relationships have a positive impact on student achievement, however, there is very little guidance on how these relationships can be developed and maximised, especially in the context of small-town and rural areas. Through this project, I hope to identify what methods senior school leaders are using to engage with parents and whānau, and how effective these methods are for both the school and their parent/whānau community. I have made this the focus of my research as I plan to be a principal in the not too distant future and will look at applying what I learn here to help in some way guide my efforts.

I would like to invite you and your school to be part of my project. This would involve me visiting your school, conducting short (30-45 mins) interviews with yourself (if possible) and 1-2 members of your senior leadership team. I would also like to run a brief (10 questions) survey (online or paper) with your parents/whānau community, as well as analyse the schools' plans, policies, and guidelines, to understand the direction in which the school community is growing and how solidarity is being promoted. All participation would be voluntary and would be subject to agreement from yourself with approval from the Board of Trustees

I will be happy to feedback my finding to you for your own evaluation, and I will also provide you with a copy of my thesis for your consideration at the end of the study.

Accompanying this letter is a 'Research Information Sheet' which provides more detailed information about the project, including the likely benefits to the school. It also outlines what would be involved if you agree for the school to participate. Please take time to read it so that you are both comfortable and aware of the processes involved in the project. I will happily answer any questions you may have - my contact details are listed below.

If you agree to participate, I would be looking for your guidance on how best to work with your community and approval on the information and questions presented to parents and whānau.

I fully appreciate your consideration in assisting me with this research. I will contact you again within seven days unless I have heard from you earlier, to hear your thoughts on this proposal and hopefully arrange a suitable date and time to come and visit the school.

In the meantime, if you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me or one of my supervisors. Contact details are as follows:

David Kallahar: djk24@students.waikato.ac.nz Ph: 0223174905

Primary Supervisor: Professor Bronwen Cowie bronwen.cowie@waikato.ac.nz

Secondary Supervisor: Sue Cheesman sue.cheesman@waikato.ac.nz

Ngaa mihi

David Kallahar

Informed consent

I have read and understood the information provided on the project: *Engaging the parent/whānau community: Methods, benefits, and challenges for senior leaders in small town and rural schools*.

I consent for my school to participate in this study and the researcher to approach members of the senior leadership team and school community to be part of the study. I have discussed this with the Board of Trustees and they too have given their approval.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Name: _____

APPENDIX B - Invitation Letter to Parents and Whānau

Kia Ora

My name is David Kallahar and I am currently undertaking a research project through the University of Waikato to complete my Master of Educational Leadership Degree. The title of my project is: *Engaging the parent/whānau community: Methods, benefits, and challenges for senior leaders in small town and rural schools*

Research has shown that strong home-school relationships have a positive impact on student achievement, however, there is very little guidance on how these relationships can be developed and maximised. Through this project I hope to identify what methods your school senior leaders are using to engage with their parent and whānau community, and how effective these methods are from both parent/whānau and senior leadership points of view.

This letter is to invite you to be part of my study. If you agree all I ask is that you complete a short survey giving me your thoughts on the way the school leaders are engaging with you and your involvement in the life and development of the school.

Participation in my project is completely voluntary. While I would love your help, there is no expectation for anyone to be involved if they do not want to. For further information on the survey, and the survey itself, please click on the link at the bottom of the page. It outlines what would be involved if you did choose to participate, what will happen to the information I gather, your rights and how I would protect your identity.

I fully appreciate your consideration toward assisting me with my research and look forward to the opportunity of hearing your thoughts. In the meantime, if you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me or one of my supervisors at the university.

Contact information:

David Kallahar: djk24@students.waikato.ac.nz

Primary Supervisor: Professor Bronwen Cowie bronwen.cowie@waikato.ac.nz

Secondary Supervisor: Sue Cheesman sue.cheesman@waikato.ac.nz

Regards

David Kallahar

[Link to survey information and survey.](#)

APPENDIX C - Research Information Sheet

Engaging the parent/whānau community: Methods, benefits, and challenges for senior leaders in small town and rural schools

1. This research project will contribute to a Masters degree thesis being undertaken at the Faculty of Education at the University of Waikato. The research has been approved by the University of Waikato Faculty of Education Ethics Committee.
2. The purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding of how schools in small towns and rural communities engage with their parents and whānau, and how this is impacting on students' learning. Research has shown that strong home-school relationships have a positive impact on student achievement, however, there is very little guidance on how these relationships can be developed and maximised, especially in the context of small town and rural areas. I would therefore like to conduct my research in your school to see how these relationships are built and maintained.
3. For the research I am planning to interview members of the senior leadership team from three schools to discuss what methods schools use to engage with parents and whānau, how effective these methods are from the viewpoint of the school, and what are the benefits and challenges involved. I would also like to survey the parent and whānau community of each school, asking similar questions. I would also like to analyse schools' plans, policies and guidelines to understand the direction in which the school community is growing and how solidarity is being promoted.
4. Information on the study will be sent out to all possible participants prior to undertaking the data collection. This information will explain what will be involved if they agree to participate, what participants' rights are, and my contact details if participants want further information.
5. I would like to record all interviews so that I have an accurate record of what participants have shared. While I have a set of questions participants can decline to answer any question and withdraw from their interview as a whole at any time. I expect the interviews to take between 30 and 45 minutes, depending on the length of people's answers. All interviews will be conducted on school grounds.
6. I also plan to send out an online survey via email to all parents and whānau within the school community who have given the school consent to send out such information. The survey will take around 15 minutes only.
7. A summary of each interview will be made and shown to the interviewee to confirm what they have said.

8. The names of all participants and that of the school will remain confidential to the researcher and his supervisors. In reporting on results, I will do all I can to make sure the school and any people remain anonymous, but this cannot be guaranteed.
9. All recorded interviews, written notes, quotes and other documentation will be stored in a locked filing cabinet or on a password protected computer at my house. Nobody other than myself and my supervisors will have access to this information. At the end of the project the raw data will be archived for five years in accordance with University of Waikato guidelines, and then destroyed.
10. The data collected during this research project will be used primarily for the completion of my master's thesis, however, parts may also be utilised within academic presentations or publications I make in the future.
11. The thesis once completed will be published and added to the university thesis database, and will be accessible to the public.
12. The collection of data for this project will ideally take place between July and September 2019.
13. If you agree to take part in this research project, you will have the following rights:
 - You can withdraw yourself and your data from the project at any time up until you have verified your interview summary.
 - You can choose not to answer any particular question(s) (in the survey and/ or interview). You can end the interview at any time.
 - You can ask any questions about the research project at any time.

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me or one of my supervisors.

Regards

David Kallahar

David Kallahar: djk24@students.waikato.ac.nz Ph: 0223174905

Primary Supervisor: Professor Bronwen Cowie bronwen.cowie@waikato.ac.nz

Secondary Supervisor: Sue Cheesman sue.cheesman@waikato.ac.nz

APPENDIX D - Interview Information Sheet for Senior Leaders

Engaging the parent/whānau community: Methods, benefits, and challenges for senior leaders in small town and rural schools

This sheet is intended to inform and guide you as you have shown an interest in participating in the interviews of senior leaders for the above titled research project.

What I would like to do:

I would like to meet with you for two sessions. The first session would be an interview (duration 60 – 75 mins). In this I will ask set questions relating to the methods that you as a senior leader in the school use to engage with the parent and whānau community, how effective you feel these are in practice, and what benefits and challenges have you found with engaging in these ways. Additionally, I would like to discuss how beneficial you feel these methods are at encouraging the involvement of parents and whānau, empowering them, and for creating solidarity within the school community.

All questions will be given to you prior to the interview once you have confirmed that you are willing to participate.

The interview will be recorded, and notes taken. The transcript of the interview will be summarised and forwarded to you prior to the second session where it will be reviewed, amended and/or confirmed. Any data that could identify a person or a place will be coded within the transcript.

Interviews will be conducted on the school premises at a time during the day or afternoon that suits you.

The second session when you review what was said during the interview will be to confirm or make any changes should you wish to (duration 15 – 20 mins). *This session may not be required if you are happy with the details in the summary forwarded to you. Confirmation to this effect via email will be sufficient.*

Your rights and protection:

Only myself and my supervisors at the university will have access to the recordings and any other data collected. Your identity and that of the school will remain confidential to me and

my supervisors. I will do all I can to ensure that the identity of the school and all interviewees' remains anonymous in any reports, but this cannot be guaranteed.

You can choose whether or not you answer each question during the interview, and you can end the session at any time. You can withdraw from the project at any time until you have confirmed your interview data.

I fully appreciate your consideration toward assisting me with this research. If you wish to participate please sign and return this form. Once I have received it, I will contact you to arrange a suitable date and time to conduct the interview. Should you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me or one of my supervisors.

Regards

David Kallahar

David Kallahar: djk24@students.waikato.ac.nz Ph: 0223174905

Primary Supervisor: Professor Bronwen Cowie bronwen.cowie@waikato.ac.nz

Secondary Supervisor: Sue Cheesman sue.cheesman@waikato.ac.nz

APPENDIX E - Interview Questions for Senior Leaders

Engagement refers to the level of involvement by two parties working together - not one party communicating information or instructions to another.

1. What is your role here within the school?
2. What responsibilities do you have in the school that require you to engage the parent and whānau community?
3. How much emphasis do you place on engaging with the parent and whānau community compared to your other responsibilities?
4. What methods do you use to engage with the parents and whānau. (list and describe with examples).
5. How effective do you feel these methods are?
6. Do you measure or track their effectiveness in any way?
7. What challenges do you face when trying to engage with parents and whānau using these methods?
8. How do you address these challenges?
9. What do you see as the benefits of engaging with parents and whānau when using these methods?
10. How beneficial has engaging with parents and whānau been for improving student learning?
11. Thinking of engagement in three progressive stages: Involvement – Empowered – Solidarity. What do you think of these three stages, and what do these stages look like in your school?
12. Where would you place the parents and whānau in your school using these three progressive stages of engagement?
13. What evidence do you have to support that judgement?

APPENDIX F - Survey Information Sheet for Parents and Whānau

Engaging the parent/whānau community: Methods, benefits, and challenges for senior leaders in small town and rural schools
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This sheet is intended to inform and guide those people who have shown an interest in participating in the survey of parents and whānau for the above titled research project.

What I would like to do:

Firstly, please continue reading this information sheet and decide if you would be prepared to help me with my research.

The survey itself will be completed online by clicking on the link located at the bottom of this sheet. *(should you wish to complete a paper version please either contact me using the email address at the end of this sheet and I will forward one to you, alternatively a copy will be available from the school office).* This is to make the survey less time consuming for you to complete and will also help me. It should take no more than 15 mins, depending on the length and detail of your answers. The survey consists of set questions relating to the methods used by the senior leaders within the school to engage with you, how effective you feel these methods are, and what benefits and/or challenges you have found when engaged in these ways.

Additionally, I would like to get your opinion on how beneficial you feel these methods are at encouraging you to be involvement in the growth and development of the school, and the education of your child.

Your rights and protection:

You can choose whether or not you answer each question during the survey, and you can end it at any time.

The identity of the school will remain confidential to me and my supervisors and not be included in my thesis.

Only myself and my supervisors at the university will have access to the survey responses. The survey does not ask for any identifying data unless you signal you want to take part in an interview. If you include this information, it will be detached from your survey responses before I begin analysing the survey data.

I fully appreciate your consideration toward assisting me with this research. Should you wish to participate please click on the link below. I will take your submitting your answers as your consent for me to use the information you have provided.

Should you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me or one of my supervisors.

Regards

David Kallahar

David Kallahar: djk24@students.waikato.ac.nz

Primary Supervisor: Professor Bronwen Cowie bronwen.cowie@waikato.ac.nz

Secondary Supervisor: Sue Cheesman sue.cheesman@waikato.ac.nz

APPENDIX G - Survey Questions for Parents and Whānau

Please read the information in the consent form attached before moving on to complete this survey. By submitting the survey once the questions have been answered you will be agreeing with what is written and to participate.

Engagement refers to the level of involvement by two parties working together - not one party communicating information or instructions to another.

Please answer the following questions:

1. How long have you been a parent or whānau member at this school?
2. Do you engage with your child's school?
3. What motivates you to engage with the school?
4. What do you see as the barriers to you engaging with your child's school?
5. How often would you engage with the senior leaders of the school?
6. Are you happy with the methods that the senior leaders at your child's school use to engage with you?
7. Which methods used by the senior leaders at the school do you feel are effective for building a stronger relationship between home and school? Why?

(Customise list of those methods identified by senior leaders as being currently used at their school)

8. Do you feel that being engaged with the school has or would improve your sense of belonging to the school community? In what way?
9. Do you feel that being engaged with the school has or would improve your child's learning? In what way?
10. If the opportunity was available, in what ways would you choose to engage with the school?

Thank you for your support with this research. Your participation is most appreciated.

APPENDIX H - Participant Consent Form

Engaging the parent/whānau community: Methods, benefits, and challenges for senior leaders in small town and rural schools
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☐ I _____, understand what the above research project is about, what I will be asked to do, and I agree to participate.

☐ My questions about the study have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions or can discuss any related matter with the researcher at any time.

☐ I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw my consent to participate up to the point at which data begins to be analysed.

☐ I understand that all data will remain confidential and any instances where the identity, of myself or the school is recorded, this information will be replaced with a code or pseudonym. I realise however, that while the researcher will make every effort, anonymity cannot be fully guaranteed.

☐ I understand that the data collected will be analysed and used primarily for the writing of the researcher's thesis, however, parts may also be utilised within academic presentations or publications made by them in the future. If the researcher wishes to use any of the data that was collected from me, for any purpose other than those stated, they will consult with me first and obtain my written consent before doing so.

☐ I understand that the research material collected from me, either digitally or in hard copy, will be stored in the researcher's password-protected computer or in a locked file drawer at the home of the researcher, during the course of the project. I am aware that once the project has been completed all data will be archived for 5 year, in accordance with the university's ethical policy.

☐ I understand that if I have any concerns or further questions about the project, I can discuss these with David, the researcher, in the first instance. If I have any concerns or questions that I do not wish to discuss with him, I can contact his supervisor, Professor Bronwen Cowie at the University of Waikato at: bronwen.cowie@waikato.ac.nz.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Name: _____